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### Neopet players fight McDonalds ban

REPORTER: Rodney Lohse  
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McDonalds has responded to the concerns of parents by blocking Australian users from Neopets' gambling games, but players are not McHappy.

Thousands of adult players are angry about the ban. McDonalds' latest Happy Meal promotion is based on a collection of cute fluffy toys called Neopets and their make-believe world on the Internet.

Last night, we revealed how - on the Neopets website - kids of all ages are being given a step-by-step guide to games like poker, roulette and blackjack. Michelle Stiebel was shocked when she found her nine-year-old son Harley gambling his heart out in a bid to keep his virtual pet alive.

The idea is that you play punting games to keep your Neopet fed and healthy. If you don't gamble, or worse, lose on the punt, your Neopet starves or is sent off to an orphanage.

McDonalds saw the light and yesterday blocked users from the gambling parts of the game. But that move has now created a storm among Neopet users, including thousands of Australian adults very, very angry that they'd had the pin pulled on their games.

Jacqui Adams, 22, and Anita Esposito, 19, are just two of the thousands of adults hooked on the Neopet games. They're now fearful the site could be shut down altogether and even argue it's not for kids.

"There are many different species, like a Loop is a dog, a Scorchio is a dragon," Anita said. "A lot of my friends are playing it, are 26-year-olds and a lot of them are married and have kids of their own."

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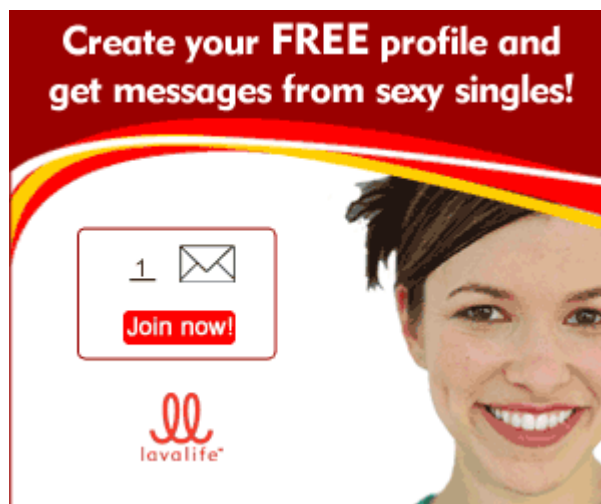


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Jacqui explains her concerns.

"Because of this controversy I'm worried McDonalds is going to stop sponsoring Neopets," Jacqui said. "That's what every one is worried about, because it's a free site."

Lisa Lee, 23, spends hours feeding her cyber pet.

"Kids shouldn't be exposed to gambling, but rather than banning the gambling they should put closer restrictions to keep kids out," Lisa said.

Louise Crooks of Perth says while Neopets are obviously aimed at kids, it's a great way for adults to escape.

"It's stress relief," Louise said. "I'm going through year 12 and sometimes you want a break."

For some players, the gambling games are too hard. They prefer non-gambling games to earn 'Neo-points'.

"Like if you win a poetry contest you can win a 1000 points," Lisa said.

**Judge for yourself: the Neopets website - which claims to have more than 70 million virtual pet owners - is at [www.neopets.com](http://www.neopets.com)**

**McDonalds Australia has an online contact form at [www.mcdonalds.com.au](http://www.mcdonalds.com.au)**

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