

Precommit on VIC pokies from 2010

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The Victorian Government has announced that from 2010, new gaming machines will need to be designed to allow players to "precommit" how much money they spend and how long they play.

In a media release¹ on 25 March, Premier John Brumby said, "The new standard will reduce gambling-related harm by allowing players to decide how much they're willing to gamble, or how much time they want to spend on the machines before they begin playing."

The full details of this strategy have not yet been made public and as is usually the case in the highly technical world of electronic gaming machines, the devil is truly in the detail. The concept of precommitment, where gamblers make key decisions about their play prior to beginning a gambling session, has long been considered an important next step in efforts to minimise gambling harm. However the crucial questions for any precommitment system are, when it comes to the crunch and a pre-set limit on time or money is set and reached, exactly how meaningful and how binding were those commitments?

Gambler's Help Southern welcomes the government's precommitment announcement. As other commentators have noted, however, a firm endorsement of the initiative will depend on further detail about the system to be used. It is to be hoped that the system will differ from that used at Crown Casino, where if a player exceeds a pre-set limit, they can continue to play.

Effective precommitment requires a system that will ensure a limit cannot be exceeded, either by playing on or moving to another machine. The system will also need to ensure precommitment cannot be breached by moving to another venue or a competitor network (Tatts versus Tabcorp). Much work is needed to determine how and when limits are set, the range of limiting options available, the potential to also include self-exclusion and the means to ensure a system that works across all venues. It is critical that the government engage with Gambler's Help services in developing these systems, to ensure they meet the needs of people with gambling problems.

A national study² of gambler precommitment behaviour found that most gamblers have

some sort of monetary amount in mind which they try to stick to whilst gambling. Their strategies for limiting gambling include adjusting bet size, bet type and setting session or weekly spending limits.

However, for many gamblers, not only do the limits set not reflect their true household budget situation, there are many triggers which send them over their limit. These include access to cash and ATMs, alcohol, feeling bored or lonely, feeling happy before gambling, the chance of winning a top payout, having a small or large win, and not getting a win/feature for a while. False beliefs in gambling (eg. a win is due, a certain betting strategy will work) and misdirected goal setting (eg. I'll play until I get so many \$ ahead; until I get so many free spins) are also major reasons for overspending.

Sources:

¹ "New measures to combat problem gambling head-on";
http://www.dpc.vic.gov.au/domino/Web_Notes/newmedia.nsf/8fc6e140ef55837cca257c8c00183cdc/de70703e9f9c432fca257417007860ed!OpenDocument

² Australian National Survey of Gambler Precommitment Behaviour 2005, McDonnell-Phillips Pty Ltd, available online at www.gamblingresearch.org.au

Further reading:

"Gamblers face stricter limits on pokies"
<http://www.theage.com.au/news/national/gamblers-face-stricter-limits-on-pokies/2008/03/25/1206207106117.html>

"Vic pokies to get time, spending limits"
<http://news.theage.com.au/vic-pokies-to-get-time-spending-limits/20080325-21fg.html>

STOP PRESS

Gaming Licence Shake-up

From 2012, Victorian hotels and clubs will own and operate pokies directly - without the involvement of current gaming machine operators, Tatts and Tabcorp.

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SOUTHERN



BOOZE AND BETS

It's no secret that alcohol consumption and gambling participation often coexist. Local pokie venues, the casino and racecourses are examples of businesses that are licensed to serve liquor and also to provide specific gaming or wagering activities.

Gambling, unlike drinking alcohol, does not involve use of substance. Yet at the problem end of the behavioural spectrum, both share similar symptoms e.g.

- an intense wish to engage in the behaviour
- irritability and/or agitation when unable to gamble/drink
- withdrawal from family and social life
- abandonment of other interests

Use of alcohol or engagement in gambling may frequently stem from the same underlying issue, for example loss of a loved one, loss of a job, inability to cope with increasing problems or loneliness. While gambling or/and drinking, some people may experience a temporary relief, a "refuge" from increasing problems. This is often the beginning of the vicious cycle as the drinking and/or gambling compounds the existing problems and adds more pressure. The need to escape becomes even greater.

Many researchers around the world have investigated the relationship between gambling and the usage of substances like alcohol or other drugs. According to the "Australasian Gambling Review – Second Edition"¹ (p. 77): "Only some regular and problem gamblers are involved in other addictive behaviours. However, the rates of alcoholism, smoking, and general drug-use appear to be significantly higher than in the general population. Current Australian data suggest that around 15–20% of problem gamblers experienced drug or alcohol dependence..."

Problem gambling may sometimes occur as a substitute for drinking, following treatment for alcohol, particularly when the underlying problem has not been fully addressed.

Sally, a client of Gambler's Help Southern, recalled that she developed a drinking problem after her son died in a car accident. She said that she fought with the problem for many years and finally managed to abstain from drinking. She thought at first that gambling in local pokies venue was harmless but soon realised it became a big problem that affected her and the family. Counselling helped Sally recognise the similar role both gambling and alcohol played and how they helped to block her emotional pain. Sally realised that learning new ways of coping with the loss of her son would help her to stop the destructive behaviours which had affected her life and those around her.

As noted earlier, in some venues it is possible to gamble and drink at the same time. Alcohol is a depressant which slows down activity in the central nervous system. After a small quantity of alcohol a person may feel more relaxed, carefree or less inhibited². As consumption increases, they may think less rationally and feel emotions more intensely. Even moderate consumption of alcohol while gambling may lead to increased risk taking.

According to research³, "regular gamblers who were administered a mild dose of alcohol took more risks and played longer...than those administered a non-alcoholic beverage...Alcohol use can adversely affect cognitive processes, leading to poor judgment and increased risk taking...impaired decision making and reduced self reflection (e.g. considering the consequences of behaviour), less regard for the actual odds of a gamble and past gambling losses."

When alcohol and gambling are both problematic, dealing with only one of them may interfere with the efforts to control the other one. Trying to address gambling behaviour without addressing alcohol use (and vice versa) may be very difficult, creating a cycle of relapse and failure. Therefore addressing

both issues at the same time may be the best way to go, reviewing the connections between both gambling and use of alcohol and examining the role they play in the person's life.

Sources:

¹"Australasian Gambling Review - Second Edition (1992 – 2006)", 2006, Delfabbro, P, University of Adelaide, prepared for the Independent Gambling Authority of South Australia; available online at <http://www.iga.sa.gov.au/pdf/0801/AGR2.website.pdf>

²<http://www.druginfo.adf.org.au/article.asp?ContentID=alcohol#what%20is%20alcohol>

³various studies, cited in "Pathological Gambling and Alcohol Use Disorder", 2002, J. Grant, M. Kushner. S. Won Kim



Victorian Commission
for Gambling Regulation

UPDATE

Gaming Venue Applications

Racers Entertainment Complex Pakenham

Increase from 92 to 105 machines
Approved

Tooraddin & District Sports Club Tooraddin

Increase from 42 to 54 machines
**Hearing adjourned at the
request of the applicant,
to a date to be fixed**

Casey Towers Narre Warren

New venue - 60 machines
Decision pending

Pakenham Lakeside Hotel Pakenham

New venue - 60 machines
Decision pending

Langwarrin Hotel Langwarrin

Increase from 44 to 60 machines
Hearing - 17 & 18 April

Frankston RSL Club Frankston

Increase from 77 to 90 machines
Hearing - 10, 11, 12 June



Welcome to new staff member, **Rebecca Confoy**, who has joined our counselling team and is

based 3 days per week at the Greater Dandenong Community Health Service. We hope she settles into her role well and enjoys all it has to offer. Rebecca has come from working in the mental health area and is pleased to be further broadening her skill repertoire and interests to treatments for problem gambling. On a personal level, Rebecca has a border collie x kelpie that gets her out walking (and chasing!) each morning before going into work.

Communities caring for young people

The launch of the Two Bays Action for Youth "Community Action Plan" occurred in March at Dromana Secondary College. The Two Bays Local Area Group (LAG) takes in Dromana, Red Hill, Balnarring, Flinders & surrounds. It was established as the final of six Communities That Care (CTC) LAGs on the Mornington Peninsula in February 2006. The group is made up of interested community members and representatives of local government, sporting groups and community agencies, including Gambler's Help Southern.

The purpose of CTC is to promote healthy personal and social development among young people so the likelihood of difficult problem behaviours will decrease. In the Two Bays region the three priority risk factors identified were:

- Favourable attitudes to drug use
- Poor family discipline
- Family conflict

The two protective factors identified as likely to assist young people to develop to their full potential were:

- Community rewards for prosocial involvement
- Peer/individual social skills

Over seventy people attended the launch and listened to key addresses from representatives of the Shire, CTC, the LAG and Riley Gay, School Captain at Dromana SC. All year 8 students received a showbag with information and products from local services. For further information about CTC or the Two Bays Community Action Plan, contact the Mornington Peninsula www.morningtonpeninsula.vic.gov.au



Lunar New Year

Gambler's Help Southern, in conjunction with Gambler's Help City, the Victorian Multicultural Problem Gambling Service and the Multicultural Health and Support Service, held a stall at the statewide Lunar New Year festival at Sandown Racecourse on the 9th and 10th February.

The two great family fun days were packed with activities, including a dragon dance, music, food stalls, rides and games. This festival is held annually and attracts many thousands of people from across the state – not only from the Vietnamese community but from many cultural backgrounds.

It was an excellent opportunity to increase awareness of Gambler's Help services through show bags and New Year calendar give-aways. Our stall stood out with hundreds of bright yellow balloons and attracted streams of families. Just under 300 people completed our short survey, each receiving a drink bottle as a "thank you" for their contribution.



Gambler's Help recently notched up its fifth consecutive year as a stallholder on Carnival Day at the Midsumma Festival. Midsumma is a major annual event for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (GLBTIQ) communities and attracts visitors from Melbourne, Victoria and beyond.

Carnival Day kicked off the festival this year and was held alongside the Yarra River in the Alexandra Gardens. In keeping with the official carnival theme of "Arrival", the Gambler's Help stall was decked out as a zany, fluoro airport arrival lounge.

Gambler's Help Community Educators were kept very busy all day - talking with festival-goers, providing information and inviting feedback on the draft GLBTIQ brochure.

Project work conducted by the Community Educators Network (CEN) over a number of years has shown problem gambling

to be an issue in GLBTIQ communities. Stakeholder feedback along the way has been clear in stating the need for targeted social marketing campaigns and information materials. The CEN hopes to have the brochure finalised and ready for release very soon.

www.problemgambling.vic.gov.au/firststep



You wrote...



James emailed Gambler's Help Southern to recommend two overseas-based websites which provide support and information to people with gambling problems. Gambling Matters thanks James for his contribution.

James wrote:

"I live in Australia and I choose to use these sites in preference to any others.

They are the best self-help problem gambling sites in the world I have come across. Both sites are free

Gamcare www.gamcare.org.uk

Safe Harbor www.sfcghub.com

Perhaps an Australian site, based on the two above, is the way to go. The sites above welcome overseas problem gamblers because that's the idea: problem gamblers helping themselves and helping other problem gamblers.

The online diary set-up that the Gamcare site provides, combined with the 24/7 chat service the Safe Harbor provides, would be the two main ingredients I would include in a self help site. Why? Because it would provide a wide variety of both practical solutions and emotional support for people who are problem gamblers and would allow them to choose which approach is best suited to their personality and circumstances."

Gamcare www.gamcare.org.uk

GamCare provides telephone, online and face-to-face counselling and support services in the UK. It is a registered charity and receives the majority of its funds from the 'Responsibility in Gambling Trust', which collects voluntary contributions from the gambling industry. Online options for non-UK residents - a moderated Forum, including a Recovery Diaries thread, Chat/Support Sessions (specified times) and a range of publications.

Safe Harbor Compulsive Gambling Hub
www.sfcghub.com

A privately funded, non-affiliated American-based site. Includes a 'Compulsive Gambler Room' with Posting Board and Chat Room/Chat Meetings (Java Applet required), 'Family/Friends Hope Room' and 'Recovery Resources Room'.

Disclaimer: Gambler's Help Southern does not guarantee the content of the listed sites, nor does it necessarily endorse the views or actions of the organisations that maintain the sites.

Gambler's Help Southern provides free, confidential, professional support for gamblers, their families and others affected by gambling.

Services available include:

- Counselling for gambling related issues
- Financial Counselling
- Community Education & Development
- Professional Development
- Multicultural Services

If you have concerns about your gambling, or the gambling of a family member or friend, call Gambler's Help Southern Intake between 9.30 am and 4.30 pm on 9575 5353 or the Gambler's Helpline which is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week on 1800 156 789.

STOP PRESS continued from p. 1 **Gaming Licence Shake-up**

Under the new structure, venues will bid directly for 10-year gaming machine entitlements. No single venue operator will be permitted to have more than 35% of the available hotel pokies.

Premier John Brumby announced the results of the review of gaming machines, Club Keno and wagering licences on April 10.

Some features of the existing system will continue, including:

- max. of 27,500 pokies outside of Crown casino
- 50:50 split between pubs & clubs
- 80:20 split between metro & country areas
- max. of 105 pokies per venue
- regional pokie caps
- a portion of gaming revenue directed into the Community Support Fund.

To view the Premier's media release, go to <http://www.premier.vic.gov.au/newsroom/new-structure-for-gaming-in-victoria-beyond-2012.html>

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