



Anti-pokies MPs slam new delay

David Killick

Anti-pokies MPs say the state government is watering down its gambling reforms at the bidding of the pokies barons – but the industry has countered with claims a card-based scheme could spell financial ruin for some venues by scaring off casual punters.

The government has revealed it has now commissioned a report into the economic impact of its plan to introduce mandatory card-based play with loss limits for



poker machines.

The scheme – first pledged in 2022 – was supposed to be in place this year but any rollout has already been delayed by at least 18 months.

The nation-leading reforms were championed by former Treasurer Michael Ferguson and were to include default loss limits of \$100 a day, \$500 a month and \$5000 a year.

Leader of Government Business Eric Abetz revealed a change of plan to parliament at 7.30pm on Wednesday.

“The Department of State Growth has engaged Deloitte Access Economics to undertake an analysis of the social and economic impact of the above, a report will be publicly released by the government,” he said.

Tasmanian Hospitality Association chief Steve Old said the industry’s concerns were on the unintended consequences of the “bureaucratic

and complex” scheme.

“In addition to tens of millions of dollars in additional costs, the proposed player card scheme will make many venues unviable as occasional and recreational players are turned away.

“Reports have shown that up to 70 per cent of recreational gamblers may never get a card. If that eventuated, the hospitality industry would be decimated with likely more than 50 regional pubs forced to close, thousands of job cuts and popular community gath-

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Kristie Johnston questions the Libs' pokies reform backdown.

ering spots lost.”

He said facial recognition technology would be a much better way of excluding problem gamblers from venues.

Independent MP Kristie Johnston said it was clear whose interest the government was acting in.

“What we have seen over the last 24 hours in parliament is confirmation that the TIIA has got to the Premier,” she said.

“Quite clearly, this is an attempt to appease the TIIA and a last-ditch attempt to kill off the card scheme.

“It is very concerning that the Premier puts profits of the pokies barons ahead of the lives destroyed by poker machines in Tasmania.”

Greens leader Rosalie Woodruff said the announcement was disappointing but not surprising.

“It is a decades-old story in Tasmania that the pokies industry has bullied Liberal and Labor politicians into doing their bidding and we’re seeing it again,” she said.

“We have got no commitment now from the Liberals, they’ve walked away from mandatory pre commitments, essential elements which were designed to make sure that people suffering with gambling addictions do not gamble away their lives and livelihoods.

“This is a win for the pokies industry. It is an absolute stain on Premier Rockliff that is al-

lowing this to happen.”

MLC Meg Webb said the move amounted to a clear attempt to undermine the implementation of the scheme.

“It is clear the Premier is preparing to break the Liberals’ election promise to deliver a mandatory pokies precommitment card as recommended by the Tasmanian Liquor and Gaming Commission, and within the agreed time frame of 2025.

“The Tasmanian community will not be fooled by empty government promises of taking harm minimisation seriously, if the planned nationwide pokies card reform is undermined, watered down or delayed in any way.”

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