

THA slams gambling reforms led by Ferguson

'Overhaul too costly, won't fit timeline'

David Killick

The head of the Tasmanian Hospitality Association says the industry "hadn't been impressed" with former Treasurer Michael Ferguson – who was championing nation-leading gambling reforms, now in doubt after his resignation from cabinet.

THA chief Steve Old said it was right that Mr Ferguson was held responsible for the Spirit of Tasmania ferries debacle – and also accused him of misleading the industry in gambling reform.

In 2022, Mr Ferguson pledged to move the state to a card-based cashless system for poker machines – with default loss limits of \$100 a day, \$500 a month and \$5000 per year.

But the rollout of the system had been delayed and the Premier has commissioned a review into its effect on jobs.

Mr Old said the industry "hadn't been impressed" by Mr Ferguson.

"We've had issues with him for a long time," he said.

"It's not gonna be able to happen on the timelines that Mr Ferguson put in place, because from all the information we've heard, it's going to be too costly, it's going to take too long to roll out.

"He said a lot of things to our industry that didn't turn out to be true.

"We'll put our faith in working with the Premier and his government moving forward."

Mr Old said the industry preferred a system of CCTV-based facial recognition to identify and exclude problem



Tasmanian Hospitality Association chief Steve Old

gamblers from venues.

Premier Jeremy Rockliff said he was keen to make a decision based on the best available evidence.

"We're committed to the card still, but we need a more measured approach when we roll out such a policy, factoring in the cost of rollout, complexity and impact on businesses across Tasmania and other technologies that are available and increasingly, as I understand it, not only available, but effective," he said.

"We're working through that now, and I expect to make a decision in the not-too-distant future."

Independent MLC Meg Webb said the announcement of a Deloitte Access review of the precommitment card policy signalled an attempt to kill off the reform.

"When the Legislative Council sits this week, I will be bringing on for debate my motion calling for the immediate release of the Deloitte Access

review terms of reference," she said.

"It is clear the Tasmanian community were not meant to know of the existence of this industry-driven review until it was complete and ready for the government to release in an attempt to justify breaking their promise to deliver potentially nation-leading pokies reforms.

"Make no mistake, the Deloitte Access review is intended to disrupt and derail the mandatory pokies precommitment card implementation process currently underway."

While debate over the precommitment card raged in Hobart, Federal MP Andrew Wilkie and allies were launching a bid for state and national laws to claw back proceeds of crime gambled through poker machines.

Independent MP Kristie Johnston said she would bring legislation to the Tasmanian Parliament to that effect.

"There is no good reason gambling companies should benefit from the proceeds of crime. It's wrong," she said.

"Money stolen to gamble should, where possible, be returned to the victim."

Ms Johnston joined Mr Wilkie and NSW MP Helen Dalton to launch an effort to create laws nationally and in each state to claw back stolen money from poker machine operators.

Ms Johnston said the legislation was inspired by the fate of Hobart butcher Robbo Robinson, who had his \$420,000 retirement savings stolen by a gambling-addicted book-keeper.