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The Mercury newspaper - online

Pokies venues enjoy bumper profits after government reforms

Changes were made to the gambling licensing model for pokie machines at Tasmanian venues. Now, the 'obscene' profits operators are enjoying have been revealed.

David Killick

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The state's poker machine operators are enjoying bumper profits under changes made to the licencing model introduced by the government two years ago.

Data provided in response to a question on notice asked by MLC Meg Webb reveals the "likely" increase in revenue was nearly 56 per cent in 2023/24 alone — although bigger venues are doing even better.

"The statewide average increase in the retained profits for licensed hotels and clubs is 55.91 per cent," the government response said.

"The percentage increase in the retained profits for approximately the top one-third of licensed hotels and clubs (30 venues) is 61.99 per cent."

The figures were released in the same week the government pushed pause on its plans for mandatory precommitment scheme amid concerns from the industry it could threaten the viability of some venues.

Ms Webb said described the boost in profits as "obscene".

"It is now obvious why the government was pressured to abandon its mandatory poker machine precommitment card," she said.

"The pokies industry was circling the wagons to protect these extraordinary and shocking pokies revenue windfalls.

"The statewide average likely increase in pokies revenue for the 2023-24 financial year is 55.91 per cent.

"The top thirty or so venues have received a likely increased in profits of almost 62 per cent."

"Advocates warned the government at the time the new licensing arrangements were put through the parliament that it would risk entrenching profits at the expense of the community, which is why the proposed mandatory pre commitment card was promised to assist mitigating that damage."

"This data confirms the pokies industry have won and are laughing all the way to the bank."

In a Talking Point published in the Mercury earlier this month, former Treasurer Michael Ferguson said he was not convinced that harm minimisation measures would harm the industry given the given the windfall profits operators were enjoying.

"The highest additional retained revenue was an additional \$73,000 in one month alone, in just one venue," he wrote.

"With so much extra profit being made right now, thanks to Liberal reforms, there is room for genuine harm reduction if we care for the public interest."
