

'Shameful' pokie about face lashed

Rob Inglis

A nation-leading plan to introduce a mandatory precommitment card for poker machines has been shelved, sparking outrage from anti-pokies MPs who say the Tasmanian government has buckled under pressure from the gaming industry.

In a joint statement issued on Tuesday morning, the stakeholder ministers responsible for proposed gaming reforms said the government was "deferring progress" on the implementation of the precommitment card, which would have imposed preset loss limits on problem gamblers.

It comes after the Tasmanian Hospitality Association (THA) spoke out against the plan, championed by former Treasurer Michael Ferguson.

THA CEO Steve Old has said the card would be "too costly" to implement and "take too long to roll out".

The peak industry body preferred CCTV-based facial recognition to identify and exclude problem gamblers from hospitality venues.

Now the government says it is considering a "broader harm minimisation package" that "may" include facial recognition technology, as well as other measures.

"As part of this package, we will be increasing funding for wraparound support services so that we can help those who need it. I'm committed to working with community service organisations to ensure the right supports are available." Community Services



Clark MP Kristy Johnston.

Minister Roger Jaensch said.

The Liberals went to the 2024 state election with a policy of introducing card-based gaming in Tasmania as soon as "practicable". However, the government's position is now that it needs to "get the balance right" between harm minimisation and "regulatory implications", including costs and "complexities".

The precommitment system would have been operated by MaxGaming, which has provided a report to the government – not released publicly – that is said to have forecast a "likely significant cost increase and implementation delays" and the need to establish a "centralised banking system".

Treasurer Guy Barnett said it was "important we get the balance right on any [electronic gaming machine] reforms".

During question time on Tuesday, Greens and independent MPs blasted Premier Jeremy Rockliff for "walking away" from the precommitment card, labelling the move "shameful".

Greens leader Rosalie Woodruff said the decision would "entrench disadvantage and poverty among vulnerable

Tasmanian families". "Premier, this will be your legacy ... a plan for profits over people," she said.

Independent Clark MP Kristie Johnston said the government had given the gaming industry "their dessert before they've eaten their veggies" and that Mr Rockliff had failed a "moral test".

"He knows the useless approach announced today only mops up the harm already caused by pokies," she said.

"It's obvious the THA is running this government."

Mr Rockliff firmly rejected Ms Johnston's assertion and said the government "remain committed to reform".

He said he would write to other state leaders about cooperating to implement card-based play with mandatory precommitment limits.

Meg Webb, the independent MLC for Nelson, labelled the "backflip" on the precommitment card "a disgraceful display of a government thoroughly captured by the pokies industry".

"As detailed by former Treasurer Michael Ferguson in his opinion piece earlier this month, the majority of licensed venues' gaming profits were up between 40 and 60 per cent in December last year alone, since the introduction of the current licensing arrangements," she said.

"Further, the mandatory pokies card did not impinge on anyone's choice but as reiterated by Mr Ferguson, the promised card is 'pro-freedom to play, pro-family and pro-business'."