

Voluntary gaming card 'is ... useless'

Baptist minister Tim Costello from the Alliance for Gambling Reform and supporters on Parliament Lawns in Hobart.



David Killick

A coalition of civil society groups has appealed to the government to stick to its plan for poker machine reforms.

The Alliance for Gambling Reform and others, including the Uniting Church, Anglicare Tasmania, Relationships Australia and TasCOSS have written a letter to state MPs saying mandatory card-based play for poker machines would save lives.

The plan, which included default loss limits to prevent problem gambling, is opposed by the gambling industry.

Alliance chief advocate Tim Costello said the government needed to stand up.

"Tasmania was to be the

first state actually delivering this historic reform, but it's up against powerful vested interests," he said.

"Of 377 alcohol licensees in Tasmania, only 90 have pokies. Those 90 pubs with pokies already have super profits – they got individual licences, their profits are up 40 to 60 per cent.

"I think the Premier, clearly, is under pressure from these powerful vested interests.

"The public deserves to be protected, and all the evidence shows this cashless card, and it has to be mandatory," Mr Costello said.

"A voluntary card is as useless as voluntary brakes in a car, or voluntary seat belts."

The open letter has been sent to all members of the

Tasmanian parliament.

"We are writing to urge you to stay the course on introducing a mandatory poker machine card with preset loss limits as recommended by the independent Gaming Commission, backed by research and championed since 2022 by then Treasurer Michael Ferguson," it says.

"Tasmania's progress on introducing a statewide card-based system for poker machines is nation-leading.

"It is recognised as a measure that will save lives. "The mandatory card will be effective in reducing harm and preventing addiction and would set a new standard in evidence-based consumer protection," the letter says.

Premier Jeremy Rockliff said he welcomed the input.

"Look, can I just say we're looking at still reforming," he said. "We're committed to reform, and we're also committed to consulting with the community as we should."

Anti-pokies MLC Meg Webb called on MPs to heed the letter and back reform.

"We know that the vested interests of the pokies industry have got the ear of both major parties behind the scenes and hold a lot of sway," she said.

"It's important for every MP who's received this letter today to see that the Tasmanian community and key leaders from that community want this card implemented.

"We need to see MPs step up, listen to the voices of community and make decisions that are right for Tasmanians, not just for vested interests," Ms Webb said.



MLC Meg Webb