

**Legislative Council
Hansard
Tuesday 24 March 2026**

The President, **Mr Farrell**, took the Chair at 11 a.m., acknowledged the Traditional People and read Prayers.

MOTION

Deloitte Access Economics Report: Social and Economic Impact of Electronic Gaming Machine (EGM) Reform Use in Tasmania - Consideration and Noting

[5.35 p.m.]

Ms WEBB (Nelson) - Mr President, I move -

- (1) The Legislative Council notes:
 - (a) That the Deloitte Access Economics 'Social and Economic Impact of Electronic Gaming Machine (EGM) Reform use in Tasmania' Report (published on Department of State Growth website 23 January 2026), found the previously planned mandatory poker machine player card with loss limits would:
 - (i) generate greater economic activity and increase jobs in Tasmania, with its central scenario indicating a net increase of Gross State Product of around \$230 million and a net increase of over 200 jobs;
 - (ii) positively impact all industries, with the exception of the EGM sector, and all regions would have a positive or neutral economic impact;
 - (iii) significantly reduce the poker machine gambling expenditure and harm, especially for people at moderate to high risk of gambling harm;
 - (iv) and reduce the costs to government delivered and associated services, including in healthcare, mental health support, homelessness programs, policing, courts and corrections.
 - (b) The Tasmanian Government's 'harm minimisation' measures for poker machine regulation announced on 23 January 2026, including:
 - (i) Gaming room closure period extended from 4 hours to 7 hours per day;
 - (ii) Introduction of a Ticket In-Ticket Out (TITO) system;
 - (iii) Setting of a new cap on statewide poker machine numbers;

- (iv) Introduction of immediate self-exclusion available in venues, and facial recognition technology as part of the exclusion scheme;
 - (v) Allowing ATMs to be placed in gaming venues; and
 - (vi) Three Gaming Officers employed statewide by Hospitality Tasmania;
- (c) Tasmanians' annual poker machine losses for 2024-25 totalled \$193,908,165, a decade-high level of losses; and
- (2) The Legislative Council calls on the Tasmanian Government to confirm in relation to the announced measures of 23 January 2026, whether:
 - (a) modelling has been done on the social and economic impact of the Government announced measures; and
 - (b) whether, prior to the decision to adopt the measures, the Government obtained advice from the Tasmanian Liquor and Gaming Commission on the effectiveness of the announced measures to prevent or reduce harm from poker machines.

I rise today to speak on my Motion No.15 on the Notice Paper on the topic of poker machine harm and the Tasmanian government policy on preventing and reducing that harm. It's possible some in the Chamber may be feeling a sense of trepidation given that we all know this is a topic I am passionate about. It's one I have considerable background in and as a result, it's one I can speak about and previously have spoken about at length in this place.

But don't be afraid, Mr President, or other members. Today we're not debating a travesty of a bill hundreds of pages long. We are debating a straightforward motion which notes some matters and which seeks the support of the Chamber for a modest call on the government to confirm two factual matters.

This is an important opportunity to put on the public and parliamentary record accurate facts in the face of government spin. It's an opportunity to begin to clarify the extent to which government policy on this matter has set aside an evidence-based approach very much in the public interest from every angle, in order to pursue blatantly industry-dictated spurious measures which are likely to result in overall more, not less, harm.

But before we begin, I would like to acknowledge that thousands of Tasmanians are experiencing an addiction to poker machines. Tens of thousands of Tasmanians, if not more, are affected by the poker machine addiction of someone close to them, because evidence tells us that for every person experiencing a poker machine addiction, there are on average five to 10 people around them also being harmed. These are family members, friends, workmates and neighbours.

In the event of today's debate triggering some difficulty for anyone in relation to a pokies addiction, or of it promoting, perhaps prompting someone to seek help for harm being caused by pokies, I provide the following sources of help and support on the record. Anglicare Tasmania's free Gamblers Help Service supporting Tasmanians experiencing gambling harm

can be contacted on 1800 243 232. There is also a Gambler's Helpline, a 24/7 information, counselling and referral service which can be contacted on 1800 858 858. And another avenue of assistance is Gambling Helpline, which can be found at www.gamblinghelponline.org.au.

Because we haven't talked about this topic for a while in this place, and for those in the Chamber who haven't been here for previous debates and discussions on the topic, first I'd like to set the scene. Poker machines are designed to be addictive. Around one in six people who regularly sit in front of them to use them as intended recreationally will become addicted to them and 40 to 60 per cent - around half - of the losses to poker machines come from people who struggle to control their use of poker machines. They are people who are addicted or developing an addiction and experiencing active harm.

Poker machine addiction can happen to anyone. It isn't a matter of a lack of responsible decision-making or a lack of willpower or a flawed character. Poker machine addiction is physical. When the button is pressed and during the time of anticipation while the wheels are spinning, dopamine is released in the brain. People become chemically addicted to the dopamine released in their brain during the moment of anticipation while using the machine. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, the DSM-5, has classified gambling disorder as a substance-related disorder.

Continuous play on a Tasmanian poker machine allows for the press of a button every three seconds. This sets up a situation where people monotonously press the button, get the hit of dopamine and hit the button again. They enter the 'zone', as it's known. People are not addicted to winning at pokies. In fact, people addicted to pokies are known to describe the annoyance of winning because it interrupts the flow of the zone they are in as they press the button.

Evidence indicates people who are under stress are more likely to become addicted to poker machines because the state of being in the zone dosed with dopamine hits provides relief from stresses. This means people will be more likely to become addicted to poker machines if they are already under financial stress, if they are in a state of grief and if they are affected by trauma in some way.

Evidence also tells us that proximity to poker machine venues also increases the likelihood of developing an addiction. In Tasmania, we disproportionately locate poker machines in our poorest suburbs where people are more likely to be experiencing higher levels of financial stress. The south of Tasmania has 23 poker machines per 10,000 people, the north of Tasmania has 35 poker machines per 10,000 people and the north-west of Tasmania has 64 poker machines per 10,000 people: nearly three times as much as the southern region.

Ms Forrest - That's where the poor people live; we know.

Ms WEBB - Yes. In the context of southern Tasmania, we have the greatest concentration of poker machines in Glenorchy, known as the golden mile, with the highest LGA losses in the state by that local government area, close to \$2 million per month. We know exactly how to make poker machines less addictive and less harmful to use, but state governments, both Tasmanian Labor and Liberal governments, have consistently chosen not to do that.

To move on to the background relevant to this motion before us, I will provide a quick overview of the key events of recent years that have led us to where we are today. This

parliament passed legislation in 2021 which made a fundamental change to pokies licensing in Tasmania. We moved from a single statewide licence model to an individual venue licence model, and this came into effect in July 2023. This handed every pokies venue a much larger slice of the pokies revenue pie. It was a gift to the venue licence holders of a massive increase in profit from poker machines.

We know from questions to the government in this Chamber that in the first year under the new licensing model, pokies profits retained by the venue were up 55.91 per cent on average statewide, with the average increase in retained profits for the top one-third earners of the licensed pokies venues being 61.99 per cent. It's a massive increase in retained profits from poker machines that was delivered under that licensing change; and we can all observe, most likely in our communities, the results of this, primarily in the near-universal renovations and venue improvements that took place in pokies venues from 2023 onwards.

Warnings that had been made at the time the legislation was passed were borne out. We warned an individual-venue licensing model would lead to higher losses, which we understand from the evidence base to also indicate an increase in pokies addiction and harm. Pokies losses have been elevated ever since the change to the licensing model, and appear to be continuing on an upward trajectory. I compare that to the decade pre-COVID and pre-licensing change where losses were gradually trending down.

After passage of the Gaming Control Amendment (Future Gaming Market) Bill, and as specified in that bill, then treasurer, Michael Ferguson, gave a direction to the Tasmanian Liquor and Gaming Commission to undertake research on the harm-minimisation options of a player card system and a facial-recognition technology system. The independent Tasmanian Liquor and Gaming Commission produced a report on that research in 2022, and the clear recommendation in that report was that Tasmania adopt a pokies player card, with programmed loss limits, as the most effective way to reduce pokies harm.

The Tasmanian Liquor and Gaming Commission advised that facial-recognition technology was not effective in preventing or reducing pokies harm, other than for those people already in the registered exclusion schemes at the extremity of their addiction experience. Michael Ferguson MP, as treasurer then, gave a directive to the Liquor and Gaming Commission to develop and implement a nation-leading pokies player card with loss limits as Liberal government policy. That was the first time ever in Tasmania that a policy on regulation of poker machines was not directly dictated by the pokies industry.

It was a momentous step forward for pokies harm reduction in this state that a government of the day, under Michael Ferguson as treasurer, set their policy based on evidence from our gaming commission: for the first time ever, not at the direction of the pokies industry itself. As a result, and as we can all imagine, the pokies industry was strongly opposed to the card and brought influence to bear on the government, no doubt from day one.

In October 2024, MaxGaming provided the government with their delivery plan report on the Tasmanian player card and gaming platform. This 173-page report showed the mandatory card was able to be implemented, providing technical details for each element and design. That was the end result of a consultation process and development process over a period of about a year and a half from the Liquor and Gaming Commission and various stakeholders, including MaxGaming.

Also in October 2024, perhaps in response to industry panic about the advanced stage of development of the card and resultant pressure that the industry brought to bear on government, a Deloitte Access Economics report was commissioned by the Department of State Growth to assess the economic and social impact of the planned card. In November 2024, the government cited the MaxGaming report as a reason to indefinitely delay rolling out the player card, claiming complexity, costs, and implementation delays. However, the chair of the gaming commission made it clear, in an interview on the ABC Radio *Mornings* program on 20 November 2024, that she was disappointed and saddened that the government was indefinitely delaying the card. She stated it was almost within our grasp to have a groundbreaking reform.

She said the Liquor and Gaming Commission fully believed in this, and had worked through all the issues and challenges that had been raised in consultation with MaxGaming, with Tabcorp executives, with the liquor and gaming branch of Treasury, and with the commission itself. The chair of the gaming commission confirmed in that ABC Radio interview that the liquor and gaming commission had put all the resolved solutions on the design of the player card system into the formal advice to MaxGaming to finalise design of the system. She confirmed that all that was needed was ministerial approval and a commitment of funding required to finalise the development and implement the card.

Also in November 2024, Michael Ferguson MP - now a backbencher and no longer treasurer - told the media the gambling lobby had pressured the Liberals to drop the card. He also cited that many venues were reaping enormous economic benefits of the changed licensing and taxation arrangements under the future gaming market reforms that gave venues a greater percentage of the losses. Mr Ferguson, in an ABC report, expressed concern about the misery of families, and that was in November 2024. It has always been clear where his motivations lie: trying to progress and make positive progress on this.

It appears a draft of the commissioned Deloitte report was provided to the government in the first half of 2025. In June 2025, before the final version of the Deloitte report was received, the government announced it would not introduce a player card without a national approach. In December 2025, the Deloitte Access Economics report was provided to the Tasmanian government. However, the report was not immediately released publicly.

The Liquor and Gaming Commission has never recommended the introduction of a ticket-in, ticket-out system for Tasmania and currently prohibits ATMs in gaming venues in this state. I'm saying this as background for further discussion later. However, on 23 January 2026, the Liberal government announced new 'harm minimisation measures' - and I'm putting that in quote marks, quite purposefully - which included longer closing hours for gaming areas in hotels and clubs, a ticket-in, ticket-out system, and provisions to make self-exclusion immediate and linked to facial-recognition technology. They also announced a new process for setting caps on machine numbers and that ATMs would be able to be located in venues. Also on 23 January 2026, the final Deloitte report was published on the Department of State Growth website with no announcement or comment from the government.

That's to set the scene for the conversation that we're going to have on this motion I'm bringing to our Chamber today. As I mentioned, Deloitte was commissioned - and this is, by way of background, some more background information to the Deloitte report - perhaps by the minister for Hospitality, we're not entirely sure; perhaps the government could confirm, but certainly through the Department of State Growth, Deloitte was commissioned to assess the

economic and social impacts of the government's player card, which was to be mandatory for all poker machines in Tasmania, and to have daily loss limits of \$100 per day and an annual loss limit of \$5000. Deloitte was tasked to assess the impact of introducing the player card on the Tasmanian economy, the behaviour of poker machine customers, and on the level of gambling harm in the state.

As I've already mentioned, I believe that this was done in a panicked way, with the assumption that such a report would assist in discrediting the card. They could not have been more wrong, if that was the motivation. When it came to light this report was being commissioned, the government wouldn't release the terms of reference for the report at the time, even though this Chamber passed a motion calling for them to be released. It never saw the light of day.

The motivation for commissioning the report was never particularly clear. It looks like a knee-jerk reaction at the behest of the pokies industry to try to concoct a reason to block the card from being implemented. However, on 23 January 2026, when the Deloitte report on the player card was released publicly on the Department of State Growth website, we saw no announcement from the government, even though it was commissioned through a government department and paid for, presumably, by Tasmanian taxpayers, for a purpose, originally, which has never been properly revealed. It slipped out onto the Department of State Growth website the same day that they made other announcements about other measures in an attempt to distract from it.

The Deloitte report said the player card developed for Tasmania would significantly reduce losses and harm, especially from those at moderate to high risk of gambling harm and that it would lift Tasmania's gross state product and that would deliver a net increase in jobs in this state.

Going on to some more detail from that report, as noted in the motion, I'm looking at page 11 of the report. I'm looking at 1.2.2 Approach overview. That outlines the broad approach taken for this work commissioned by the government. It outlines that a computable general equilibrium (CGE) modelling was used to estimate the net economic and social impacts of the player card.

It outlines that three scenarios were modelled based on a spectrum of evidence available and to reflect different ways that behaviour may be influenced by the policy. With that background in the approach taken, there are some key findings that have been made in the report that the motion speaks to and that I'm going to outline briefly for discussion here today.

The first one is that there was a finding from the report that the pokies card developed for Tasmania would generate greater economic activity and increase jobs in Tasmania compared to the current situation. The central scenario as part of that modelling work done indicated a net increase of gross state product of around \$230 million and a net increase of over 200 jobs.

If the player card was introduced, Deloitte estimated under central scenario that these would be the outcomes: a boost to gross state product of around \$230 million and similarly an increase of over 200 jobs in this state. That is nothing to sneeze at; these are significant economic benefits to the state. The player card would reduce income for venues with poker machines, but this is offset by increases in expenditure in other sectors. Money spent on poker

machines creates very few jobs compared to the same amount being spent on virtually any other goods or services in our community. That's something that I've discussed in this place before, that \$1 million spent on poker machines, for example, generates a very few jobs, marginal jobs, compared to \$1 million spent - even if we compared it to other areas of the hospitality industry - food and beverages, for instance, or certainly retail or other sorts of goods and services generate far more jobs. Introducing the player card would improve economic activity compared to the current poker machine environment.

I found it very interesting in the report, too, for members thinking about their local areas, there's a local government area (LGA) breakdown across pages 24 and 25 of the economic impact and the net job impact. You can see for yourself that all LGAs come out quite positively or, at worst, neutrally. This player card developed for our state is a benefit around the entire state, and some particular LGAs come out very well.

Another finding from the report is that the player card developed for Tasmania, the nation-leading gold standard player card I should say, developed for Tasmania, would positively impact all industries with the exception of the EGM sector - that's the pokies industry - and all regions would have a positive or neutral economic impact. The Deloitte report found positive economic benefit from the player card would especially be felt in regional areas that have a lot of machines currently, and that's because the money that was no longer being spent on poker machines under harm scenarios would be spent in other sectors of the economy and other businesses in those areas and generate more economic activity and more jobs.

This means economic benefit would be felt by non-pokies businesses in the local government areas of, for example, Devonport - because Devonport has pokies losses of nearly \$1 million every month - Burnie, Central Coast and Waratah-Wynyard LGAs, where each of those have pokies losses of about \$500,000 every month, and the cities of Glenorchy, which, I've already mentioned, has pokies losses of close to \$2 million every month, and Launceston, where pokies losses are around \$1.5 million every month.

In all of those scenarios, the harm that is lessened, the money that moves from being spent on harmful pokies use is then spent in other parts of the economy in areas that generate better economic development and activity and greater jobs. For each of those areas, a significant proportion of a reduction in the losses to poker machines would get spent elsewhere in the economy. That would mean that there would be also, when we reduce poker machine harm, more available workers at higher productivity levels due to that reduction in gambling amongst the workforce, and particularly harmful gambling, and there would be substitution of pokie spending for the consumption of other goods and services, generating higher employment.

Similarly, the finding in this report - in relation to the gold-standard nation-leading pokies card developed for Tasmania ready to be rolled out, basically, with ministerial approval, and the only final thing needed to press go on that implementation - was that a player card would significantly reduce the poker machine gambling expenditure and harm, especially for people at moderate to high risk of gambling harm. Through its modelling, Deloitte estimated the player card would reduce total gambling losses by 23 to 46 per cent.

In preparation for this motion, I provided a briefing paper to members for their reference in case they required some background information and I need to make a correction. In that briefing paper, when I was referring to this figure of 23 to 46 per cent reduction, I did mention

there that it was in relation to poker machine losses, but in fact it was total gambling losses. Nevertheless, the point remains the same. In fact, the reduction in poker machine expenditure would be in the vicinity of 27 to 58 per cent.

The Deloitte report referred to research that showed cashless gambling without loss limits generally increases losses and harm. The proposed player card's harm-minimisation features of daily, monthly and annual loss limits would be particularly effective at controlling losses and thereby reducing harm for people at moderate to high risk of gambling harm.

Reducing the risk of higher levels of pokies harm would decrease the demand and the cost for health, social support, and justice and policing services, as well as improving productivity and community wellbeing. There are no negatives here. All of this is upside in relation to this nation-leading card developed for Tasmania.

A further finding in the report relates to the fact that the pokies card developed for Tasmania would reduce costs to government for delivered and associated services, including in health care, mental health support, homelessness programs, policing, courts, corrections and more. Therefore, in addition to the higher economic activity it would generate, the report shows the player card would reduce costs locally for government-associated services. Reducing poker machine losses, especially from people at risk of moderate- to high-risk gambling, reduces the costs to government and creates a more productive community.

I'm going to refer to page 37 of the report under 4.2, the heading being 'Impact of gambling harm to players and their communities':

The harms of gambling are far-reaching and extend beyond the direct financial impact on the individual gambler. The Socio-Economic Impact of Gambling (SEIG) Framework provides a guide for assessing the quantitative, qualitative, and monetary costs and benefits of gambling, covering six impact domains, including:

1. health and wellbeing,
2. economic and financial,
3. employment and education,
4. recreation and tourism,
5. legal and justice, and community and culture impacts.

These can occur sequentially or in parallel.

Note, while all these domains are associated with a cost to society or the economy, only some have been quantified regarding their impact on the economy (refer to Section 2). Categories that represent costs to the individual, or do not directly contribute to Tasmania's total economic production, or Gross State Product (GSP), are not in-scope for the CGE modelling and therefore have not been included in the impact of the reform on the economy.

That gives you the picture of the extent to which they cast the net to be assessing the benefits or otherwise here of the card, and it comes out resoundingly well.

Of particular note in relation to some of those areas of gambling-harm costs borne by our community and economy in terms of health and wellbeing, and again still on page 37 of the report, under 4.2.2, 'Health and wellbeing', it says:

Gambling is an important public health issue, with recent estimates ranking it as the third largest contributor of disability adjusted life years lost to ill-health in Victoria, following major depression and alcohol abuse and dependence.

That's quite shocking. It's the third largest contributor of disability adjusted life years lost, according to local Australian research. That's a concern. No wonder it's a cost to our health and social services sector. Also we can see, if we turn over to page 38 of the report, there's a well-understood and well-researched link between gambling addiction and harm and increased levels of family violence, and we would all understand that that's going to be something that contributes as a cost to our community, not just economically through the services and supports that are required in that space through our criminal justice system, but also through our social supports, and the human cost of anything that adds to and increases family and domestic violence.

It says here on page 38:

Gambling can be detrimental to family and spousal relationships, ranging from heightened risk of tension and stress to domestic and family violence.

It also says further down that page:

Research has shown also that problem gambling is associated with greater rates of domestic and family violence. One survey found that 55.6% of problem gamblers reported perpetrating intimate partner violence in the previous 12 months and 59.7% reported being victims of such violence.

It's a disturbing connection there. There are so many reasons that we want to genuinely be focused on effective harm minimisation when it comes to gambling, to reduce rates of gambling addiction, which makes it all the more obscene when all this government is doing is pretending to go down that path.

We also have in the report references, on page 39, to the fact that there are employment and education benefits from reducing harm to gambling. I point people, particularly in terms of education and employment for young Tasmanians, to reports from Anglicare Tasmania. I'm looking particularly at its report titled *The poker machine card. Simple as*. On page 8 of that report, where it presents in a graph that from 2021-2022 to the next year, 2022-2023, the number of people aged 18 to 24 who sought help from Anglicare Tasmania due to poker machine harm doubled. It doubled in one year. This is not an issue and a problem that is felt only by older Tasmanians. It is one that is an active and problematic issue for young Tasmanians. That is naturally going to flow through then, and have consequences when it comes to education and to employment for younger Tasmanians.

Of course our legal and justice system are impacted, and that's dealt with in the Deloitte report. It points out that there are legal and judiciary impacts from gambling, primarily relating to costs associated with criminal justice and policing, as well as costs associated with gambling-related crime. There are very clear links: people who become advanced in a poker machine addiction, and then begin to potentially commit crime, often fraud, and that often affects workplaces. When people are pursuing their addiction, it's out of their control, and they're desperate to find money to feed that addiction.

The other point that's made here in the Deloitte report about the legal system is the fact that further research demonstrates that poker machines are heavily involved in money-laundering activities. That's something that will come up a little bit later, when we're talking about the government's measures. Money laundering hasn't been a strong feature, necessarily, of our poker machine environment in Tasmania, unlike in some other states where it has been revealed there is a significant problem. However, what I'm going to suggest to you as a little preview now of what I'm going to suggest to you later, when we speak about the things the government plans to do, instead of a gold-plated card, the things that the government plans to do are actually going to expose us to a much higher risk of money laundering becoming a feature of our poker machine environment in Tasmania. That's just absolutely inexcusable, quite frankly.

To wrap up on this aspect of the motion, noting the Deloitte Access Economic, Social and Economic Impact of Electronic Gaming Machine EGM Reform Use in Tasmania report, I'd just like to remind the members of a few things. The report was commissioned by the government at a time when it was under pressure from the pokies industry to ditch the player card policy, and it was commissioned, I think, with the expectation of discrediting that policy. However, the report appears to then have been withheld by the government, with a significant amount of time between the draft report being provided in the first half of 2025 and the government receiving the final report in December 2025, and then the report being published on the State Growth website with no acknowledgement from the government at all in January 2026.

To me, this says the government was pretty much pulled up short when this report came back with such glowing endorsement of the card developed for our state. It would be nation-leading, and gold standard in terms of reducing harm. After their January release of this report and the government's announced measures that I will speak about in this motion as well, I asked for a briefing on the government's announced measures. During that briefing that I was provided, and I was very grateful to be provided with the briefing, I did ask about whether the findings of the Deloitte report, some of which we've just discussed now, had been considered by the Treasurer in the development of the government's announced measures.

I was told in that briefing that the Deloitte report was commissioned by State Growth, and not by the Treasurer or Treasury, and that neither the Treasurer nor Treasury had seen it. That is an astonishing revelation. We've got one part of government commissioning this report, paying for it with taxpayer dollars, on a very important topic that is actually under the responsibility of the Treasurer and Treasury. Then, when that report is provided to government, and to the department that commissioned it, State Growth, it isn't apparently shared with Treasury and the Treasurer to inform any policy and decision-making on this topic by the Treasury and the Treasurer.

I presume - and it's on the government to confirm or deny this - that Cabinet also as not briefed on the Deloitte report, and that Cabinet did not take the findings of this report into consideration when making decisions about throwing out the player card developed for our state, and adopting instead a series of spurious non-evidence-based measures that were announced in January.

It could only have been a deliberate decision by the Premier, by the Treasurer and by every cabinet member, quite frankly, to not seek a briefing on the Deloitte report and inform themselves properly of this work commissioned by this government with taxpayer money to assess the impact of the Liberal policy on a pokies player card, which at the time it was commissioned, was government policy.

So, now we have a policy that was originally announced by Michael Ferguson as treasurer in a Liberal government that was not only comprehensively researched and recommended by the independent Tasmanian Liquor and Gaming Commission but has now been shown to be positive for our state on all fronts in a report originally commissioned to try to discredit it. A policy that was ready for the final approval decision to press go on the last phase of its implementation in late 2024. A policy that every single independent expert on this topic will confirm is gold standard in preventing and reducing harm genuinely.

It is a policy that this government, panicking under pressure and influence from the powerful pokies industry party donors, has thrown aside with no rationale able to stand up to scrutiny to justify that decision. Policy and regulatory capture of government when it comes to poker machines has always been the norm in Tasmania: blatant, bold-faced bully boy behaviour from an industry that has so much financial weight and influence to throw around. But this disgraceful backflip by the Rockliff government on a public health matter in which Tasmanian lives are at stake absolutely takes the cake. Yet, it gets worse, when we look at what the government has the gall to propose in place of the exemplary player card.

Having covered the Deloitte report briefly, but with the highlights, I'm going to now move on to part (1)(b) of the motion, which is the Tasmanian government's measures announced on 23 January 2026.

Having abandoned the evidence-based, Tasmania Liquor and Gaming Commission recommended, well-developed player card in June 2025, the Treasurer, Eric Abetz, announced in January 2026 a suite of new 'harm minimisation measures' for poker machines and their venues. I'm using inverted commas when I say 'harm minimisation measures'.

These measures were presented in a media release, and no further detail was available on them. So, I sought a briefing on the announced measures, as did, I believe, other MPs, and I received a briefing on 19 February from a Treasury staff member and an adviser from the Treasurer's office. Very little detail was able to be provided in the briefing and the Treasurer's adviser agreed to take an extensive list of questions on notice and to provide answers at a later date. I was really impressed with the engagement that I got about that, and pleased to be provided with some of those answers a little bit down the track. They are presented in a document sent back to me and it is labelled 'official'. It doesn't have the signature of the Treasurer on it the way we would expect, for example, with questions on notice coming back to us in this Chamber or questions without notice coming back to us. But because it was emailed to me with information in it and it is labelled 'official'.

Mr President, I seek leave to table the document so that it's part of this debate on the parliamentary record.

Leave granted; document tabled.

There are numerous questions that were taken on notice from that briefing that I received which remain unanswered and have been indicated in the document I have just tabled as requiring advice or information from Treasury or the gaming commission.

Before examining each of the government's announced measures, I do want to address some overall considerations when it comes to the government's set of measures announced, and also, from the answers I received both at the briefing and then afterwards in these questions taken on notice.

Straight off the bat, the following statement is made in the answers to my questions taken on notice that catches my eye, and that statement reads this:

The government is of the view that the package contains measures which can very reasonably be expected to reduce harm.

Now, I want to be very clear here with members: there is no basis on which the government can claim to have that expectation, reasonable or otherwise, and they have not been able to produce any evidence to back that claim of an expected reduction in harm. The new measures announced by the government were not advised by the Liquor and Gaming Commission, are not backed by evidence as being shown to reduce or prevent harm, were not consulted on publicly, and have not been assessed for their economic and social impact.

In fact, not only is there no evidence base or research to indicate these would be effective measures to reduce or prevent harm, some of the measures may well likely actively promote greater harm from pokies and introduce greater risks, for example, of money laundering.

The Treasurer also says in answers to my questions taken on notice after the briefing, and I quote:

A package of measures was announced earlier this year informing this package, which is a position of the government. Input was sought from a variety of stakeholders including the Liquor and Gaming Commission and Treasury. This input was considered by the government in coming to a decision.

That's an important sequence there, in that statement. They say input was sought and that the input was considered by the government in coming to a decision. We actually should examine that a little bit carefully, because that's misleading at best. And certainly, it has been a topic of conversation in the other place during these two sitting weeks - last week and this week. I'm not going to reflect on that, but there are matters that came up there that need to be clarified here. I'm going to seek to clarify them because, in the other place, when asked about the consultation that occurred on these measures announced by the government, there was some complete confusion.

Initially, when the Treasurer was asked about the consultation that was undertaken for these to inform the decision to adopt this range of measures that were announced, the Treasurer confirmed to the Chamber in the other place that they had consulted with three organisations: Anglicare, Hospitality Tasmania and the commissioner.

Then he went on, only to have to correct the record later that day because he had actually misspoken there, particularly in relation to the sequence of events, and he indicated he had personally consulted with three organisations prior to the Cabinet decision, but in fact it was only two prior to the decision being made by Cabinet. It was Anglicare Tasmania and Hospitality Tasmania that the Treasurer had interacted with about these measures, and that the commissioner was consulted afterwards.

Let's be really clear here. The only consultation that occurred on these measures were with Anglicare Tasmania and with Hospitality Tasmania, the peak body for the pokies industry groups that are part of the industry here.

I can guarantee you Anglicare Tasmania have been steadfast, and I believe members have had a communication today from Anglicare Tasmania, confirming their very clear view that the best and only reasonable way forward for our state when it comes to reducing harmful poker machines is to go with our well-developed, absolutely nation-leading player card with loss limits. That is the thing that Anglicare maintains a steadfast support for.

So, we can guess, surmise, that when the Treasurer went to Anglicare Tasmania prior to Cabinet making a decision to talk about this list of measures that the government subsequently announced, Anglicare Tasmania would have shared their very firm view with him. In that, I'm not seeking to verbal Anglicare Tasmania and they can certainly make it clear. I think they've been crystal clear about what their recommended and advised option is. It wouldn't have got support from Anglicare.

The most astonishing thing about that interaction in the other place was that the Treasurer confirmed he did not speak to the commissioner. The gaming commissioner is the Chair of the gaming commission, the person you generally refer to as the commissioner, and that in this state is Jenny Cranston. The gaming commissioner was not consulted, the Treasurer has confirmed, prior to Cabinet making a decision on these measures. Don't you think, of all the people in this state that you would responsibly consult with as a government and as a Cabinet you would expect to seek advice from before making a decision on such a consequential policy, don't you think that the advice you would want to see would be from your independent gaming commission, from your commissioner, the chair of that commission, to see what they thought about the potential effectiveness or otherwise of the measures being proposed to you to be decided on? That's not what happened.

We then had further confusion, though, and it's important to clarify this, because the Treasurer then had to come back the next day when he was pressed further on it to talk about who he did consult with, because he got a bit tripped up about whether he spoke to in fact the commission or the commissioner, and who in fact the commissioner might be. He mentioned by name a public servant, who is Jonathon Root. He was mentioned by the Treasurer in his answers to questions and the Treasurer suggested that that was who he was referring to when he had said he consulted with the commissioner.

I want to be clear here, and it's unfortunate when public servants are named in this place, so I'm just wanting to clarify because there could be confusion around the role that Jonathon Root has. Jonathon Root is the director of the Liquor and Gaming Branch, and he is, I believe, commissioner for Licensing. He is not the commissioner for gaming. The person we would refer to as the commissioner for gaming is the chair of the gaming commission, and that's Jenny Cranston. Therefore, when the Treasurer tries to pretend that Jonathon Root was in fact the commissioner consulted, that confuses me and concerns me even more, because in fact what we saw was consultation with potentially a public servant in the Treasury Department, Jonathon Root, around these measures, but not the gaming commissioner, the chair of the gaming commission, then that is problematic.

Where on earth did any advice from the commission come into this? It looks like it didn't come into it even after Cabinet had made the decision. It's all quite concerning.

The other thing that concerned me about answers provided is that the Treasurer seems to imply that he should get policy advice on poker machine regulatory matters and poker machine policy matters from Treasury, but not from the gaming commission. That's what he implied in the other place in his answers. That's problematic because under our legislation, the gaming commission, the chief commissioner in charge of it and the other commissioners, the gaming commission are tasked with two things under our act broadly. They're tasked with being the regulators of that industry and being responsible for setting and enforcing the regulation, but under our act they are also tasked with providing policy advice to government, both on request and also potentially even on their own motion.

That is literally a role they have under our act: to provide policy advice to government when it comes to poker machines. This is the commission that was not consulted by the Treasurer on the measures that were adopted by government and decided on by Cabinet, and every single member of Cabinet agreed to decide on those measures, ultimately, without having any advice in front of them from the gaming commission. Every member of Cabinet.

Let's go on to specifics about these announced measures. The first one I'm going to speak about is the announcement that there would be an extension of the gaming room closure period from four hours a day to seven hours per day. Currently, gaming areas of hotels and clubs have a mandatory four-hour closure every 24 hours at the time of the venue's choice. That's the minimum. It's not that they have to be open 20 hours a day, but it's permissible that they are open up to 20 hours per day, and for four hours a day there must be a mandatory closure. The reality is, of course, that when the government talks about its announced increase in that closure period and trumpets the fact that it's a 75 per cent increase from four hours to seven hours every 24 hours, the reality is that that will affect very few venues statewide, because very few venues statewide operate their gaming rooms for the full, currently allowable, 20 hours a day.

Therefore, this change is likely only to impact a very small number of venues and, quite frankly, when I tried to find out if we knew the extent of this - because if there was any proper policy development work with responsible modelling of this sort of proposal, you would think the government would have done that policy work and have an understanding of how many venues would be affected by this sort of proposal - the government, in fact, in the briefing, wasn't able to tell me whether and how many of our venues currently in the state operate at the full 20 hours a day, and how many operate less, and if so, how much less. They weren't able to identify how many venues, therefore, would be impacted by the change they're proposing to make, so that we could therefore even begin, in a very rudimentary way, to understand what

the impact of this change might be. The government certainly doesn't have any concept of what the impact of this change might be because they don't even know how many venues it's going to apply to and impact on.

The government also wasn't able to tell me whether the Liquor and Gaming Commission monitors or audits the opening hours of venues to be able to provide an indication of how many venues would be affected. They weren't able to tell me whether the commission would even have that information. That indicates to me the government has adopted this change with literally no clue as to its likely impact. They're making an assumption. They're going by the vibe of the thing. We're going to make them close, not four hours, but seven hours a day. The vibe of the thing tells us that that's going to reduce harm. That's absolute rubbish. We know literally nothing about how much harm may or may not be reduced by that measure. We don't even know how many venues that might likely impact.

Here's the thing: even if we were optimistically to think that this would impact all venues, and suddenly all venues were closed for a little longer each day, gaming areas are still allowed to be open, under this new announcement, 17 hours of every day. Gaming venues would continue to target those hours at customers at risk of experiencing harm, because that's exactly what they do now. They target the hours they know that they get players who spend the most money because they are being harmed by their gambling.

Those hours include after-school drop-off and it also includes late-night and early-morning hours. Seventeen hours a day still leaves you plenty of time to plan to target the most vulnerable people sitting in front of your machines. Because there's no prescribed same time for the closure period, customers are also then able to move from one venue to another. If one venue that they're in is about to close, another one may well time its closing hours to not directly correlate so that we get passage of poker machine users between venues.

Of course, if we were properly developing policy in this space and we were seriously contemplating this as a proposed measure, what we would ask ourselves is, 'Would it be invaluable to have a mandatory time shutdown that would apply to all venues, so every one was closed at the same seven hours a day, for example?'

Of course, that is not what the government is proposing. When I put it to them and asked them whether they would be prepared to consider such a thing, to even maximise the value of this virtually meaningless announcement and measure, the government indicated to me it's unwilling to mandate the closure period of seven hours a day. Absolute rubbish.

That's a strike one there. Trumpeting the fact that you're extending gaming room closing hours - mandatory closing hours - is virtually meaningless. The government cannot point to the impact it will have. There is no indication that it will meaningfully impact harm. You cannot call it a harm reduction measure. I don't believe our gaming commission would call it that, but the government doesn't know that because they haven't asked them. They certainly didn't ask them before deciding on the measure.

The next cab off the rank in the government's measures was that it planned to introduce a ticket-in, ticket-out (TITO) system. This would replace our current coin-based system. It's so bizarre to me to see the Treasurer refer, in his answers to my questions taken on notice and also in other circumstances, to this as if it's some improvement, as if it's some getting with the modern program, to move away from a coin-based, outdated system.

Here's the thing: one of the reasons the Tasmanian government has been able to say very regularly over the years that Tasmania has lower per-capita losses on poker machines than other states is because we have a coin-based system. It's actually a protective factor in this state, so any move to step away from our coin-based system should be absolutely, rigorously indicated by evidence that it would be a step towards greater harm reduction rather than towards vulnerability to more harm. That's not what this TITO proposal is going to do.

So, the TITO proposal apparently would work in this basic way: customers would purchase a ticket with money loaded onto it, they use it on the poker machine and they get a ticket from the machine with their balance, which they can then take to another machine or to cash in at a cashier. The government intends to introduce this system that would allow \$200 to be loaded onto a ticket and would allow for \$100 to be able to be loaded from the ticket onto the poker machine at a time.

The announcement is that it lacks any other detail, virtually, to properly explain how the TITO system would work, but what we could guess and surmise is that it is likely to operate similarly to what it does in some other jurisdictions. It's likely to operate through a vending machine: that's most commonly in use elsewhere. So, it's not going to be that you have to go to a counter to buy a ticket from a person, which, by the way, would be a more protective factor over any system, because interacting with a human in this whole process is building in a potential protective factor, but doing things entirely through a machine is not necessarily doing that.

The policy is silent on whether people would be able to buy more than one ticket at a time or whether there'd be any limit on the tickets purchased in a day, for example. If there were limits on tickets purchased, if that was imposed through this policy, there's no indication of how that would be monitored and enforced, how the system would practically work to enforce a limit. So, with no human oversight and no limit on how many tickets can be purchased, a TITO system can easily be used for money laundering, as it has been in other states with similar systems.

It can easily feed a pokies addiction very readily for people who are highly vulnerable. It's much more dangerous, potentially, than a coin-based system, and it's not something that the Liquor and Gaming Commission have advised. I would guess perhaps the government deliberately didn't seek advice from the gaming commission because they knew exactly what the gaming commission would say to them about this and other measures that have ended up on this proposed list of measures from the government.

This is not a well-indicated system. Just because we're following other states on this is not something to pat ourselves on the back about or congratulate ourselves. These other states have higher per-capita losses; these other states have far greater money laundering risks; these other states have higher levels of harm than we have here. This is looking, potentially, to be stripping away protections we've had in place here under our system that are legacy protections.

They're not perfect and I would like to see them absolutely updated with something proper, like the nation-leading player card with loss limits programmed, which is exactly what the evidence base tells us is the best outcome for our state. We shouldn't be updating our system that puts us into a space of greater risk. The Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation research shows that cashless gambling, such as a TITO system, increases losses and therefore

increases risk of harm unless it's accompanied by mandatory pre-commitment or loss limits. The Treasurer says this in answers to my questions on notice after the briefing:

In relation to ticket-in, ticket-out systems (TITO), it is a point of fact that Tasmania is the only jurisdiction in the country that has not moved away from EGM use by coin only in hotels and clubs. It's proven technology in use across the country. Its introduction will allow for the modernisation of gaming systems in place in Tasmania and will go hand in hand with the use of ticket value limits and improved controls on access to cash through FRT [facial recognition technology] ensuring that TITO supports the overall harm-minimisation framework.

Absolute rubbish: there's nothing to support any of that, literally nothing. The fact that Tasmania is the only jurisdiction in the country that has not moved away from coins is, as I've said, perfectly reasonable and has been a protective factor. This technology is proven technology in use across the country: it's proven to be delivering jurisdictions that have higher levels of pokies harm and that have higher risk of money laundering. Its introduction will not allow for the modernisation of gaming systems; it will allow us to sink into the pit of greater harm that other jurisdictions are already experiencing.

It's astonishing to me that there can be any claim that a TITO system supports overall harm-minimisation frameworks. It doesn't, and the gaming commission would tell us that and any evidence base would tell us that. The government just hasn't taken the time and has deliberately chosen not to go to the effort of creating an evidence base that supports these measures and looking for one, in order to justify them with a rationale; there is no rationale.

The TITO policy as announced would be a major change for Tasmania towards a cashless system, but it has no pre-commitment or loss limit features. The evidence is very clear that this will drive higher losses and greater harm. The Treasurer cannot pretend that limiting the amount you can load onto a machine is in any way equitable or comparable to having a programmed loss limit. That is simply not the case, and if there's no limit on the number of tickets I can get, I can literally go to the vending machine and get myself \$5, \$10, \$200 worth of tickets, \$1000, \$2000. I can get those and I can go and sit down at machines and I can start using them. Yes, I might have to load on again after I've used my first \$100; there's nothing stopping me then going through all of those tickets and losing all of that money in one go. There is nothing remotely comparable when it comes to harm minimisation in what the Treasurer is proposing with this TITO system, and what would be delivered under a player card with programmed loss limits. The Treasurer claims this in answers to my questions on notice after the briefing:

The introduction of TITO must be viewed in the context of the full suite of measures, which includes limits on the value of tickets, improved controls on access to cash and clearer oversight from the Liquor and Gaming Commission, to ensure that the introduction of TITO occurs within a strong harm minimisation framework.

Again: utter rubbish, just rubbish. We do not have a strong harm-minimisation framework. We've had one of the strongest in the country and that's protected us, but here we are, eroding it. Here we are, deliberately turning our back on it. The introduction of TITO

erodes features of our harm-minimisation system that, paltry though it is, we do have in place in Tasmania.

The government is unable to provide any evidence or modelling demonstrating the impact of introducing this TITO. They haven't modelled it. They don't know what to expect as an impact. Maybe it's the vibe of the thing again. It's nonsense to point to clearer oversight from the Liquor and Gaming Commission, which the Treasurer does there in his answer to my question. Apparently, this will deliver clear oversight. How? There's absolutely no evidence to back that up; and if so, clearer oversight of what, specifically, and what exactly is the impact that will deliver? How exactly would that be linked to harm reduction? None of that policy work or evidence base has been presented because it hasn't been done.

By the way, they're using the Liquor and Gaming Commission's name in vain there, I believe, since they haven't even asked the commission about the role that it will play in that. We knew that they hadn't asked them about it, certainly in developing and deciding on these measures. Let's be really clear: the Tasmanian Liquor and Gaming Commission is an independent statutory entity in that sense, but it has to do what it's told, basically. It works within very narrow parameters imposed on it by our legislation and by government policy directives that are given to it. So, when the Treasurer says this in answers to my questions taken on notice:

The commission, who are required to foster responsible gambling behaviour, will have a significant role in making implementation decisions regarding TITO and the use of FRT in venues.

Well, that's only dependent on the government giving them a direction with the scope, and empowerment to do that. If the government doesn't give them a direction that's appropriately configured to give them the freedom and availability to independently do that, then they're constrained from doing it, and what we will get is a commission having to, within parameters provided by government, design this system.

It's absolute nonsense to pretend they're going to have free rein, the commission that is, to go and make this some whiz-bang great dinky-di system. The commission have already made it patently clear again and again that, in their view, it is a player card with programmed loss limits that is the right system for this state and that they spent a number of years developing and had on the verge of being implemented.

Experts confirm that our current coin-based system has a far lower risk of money laundering and a player card with loss limits has zero risk of money laundering. While the Treasurer says, in answer to my questions taken on notice:

While no government position has been taken at this stage on data handling or ticket validity, operational decisions on TITO will be determined by the commission, including controls that address money laundering risks.

The commission, if asked, I believe, would readily tell government that the best way to remove money-laundering risks entirely is to introduce the developed player card with programmed loss limits. They've been very clear that's an absolute rock-solid benefit of a player card. If Tasmania is to move to a cashless system for pokies, the player card system is vastly superior to a TITO system, both for harm minimisation and for money-laundering risk.

The current cap on electronic gaming machines for hotels and clubs is 2,350. The number of machines currently installed sits at 2,274. That was on 30 June 2025. That brings us to the next measure the government is proposing, which is the setting of new caps on statewide on poker machine numbers. The government is allowing hotels and clubs until 30 June this year to apply for licences to reach the cap, because we've been under the cap the entire time, we've had a cap. After 30 June this year, a new cap will be set at whatever the number of machines installed at that time is in the state. Fair enough. No worries. We've never hit the cap anyway. By all means, let's make the cap whatever the number of machines is on 30 June this year. They then say the cap may then gradually reduce over time because as venues potentially relinquish their machines, with every second machine relinquished, that will be removed from the available pool of machines and, over time, incrementally, that may well reduce the cap of machines.

It's important to note here that this is another measure that the government is saying they expect to deliver harm-minimisation results. They have absolutely, literally no reason on which to expect that. There is no evidence to tell them that marginally reducing the cap we currently have on machines will have any tangible impact on harm, on pokies losses and on the impact of pokies in the state.

It's important to note that fewer machines do not necessarily mean fewer losses or less harm. There is not a simple relationship between the number of machines and pokies losses. It's simplistic to talk about natural attrition of machine numbers as harm minimisation. It simply isn't. Especially not if it is only very, very small reductions, which is most likely under this measure. It's fine. There's no reason not to do it. By all means, let's lower our cap to the number of machines we have on 30 June. If over time we have marginal decreases in the number of machines as machines may be relinquished and we take every second one of those out of the pool, great. No reason not to do that, but there's zero evidence to support that being described as harm minimisation. Zero evidence to say that will impact on the level of losses in our state.

One of the ways we know that - I put this in the briefing paper I provided to members - is that we can look at the number of poker machines in the state and just look potentially at the change in number of machines. For example, from 2019 to 2025, we can see that across that time, when it comes to pokies in hotels and clubs, there were fewer venues with pokies for a start, and there were fewer machines between 2019 and 2025, and losses went up in that time in terms of just raw numbers - the same for in casinos: across the years, from 2019 to 2025, there were fewer machines in casinos and yet losses went up in raw numbers. It's quite a dramatic increase, actually, in casinos. That's the thing.

There is no actual discernible correlation between losses and harm and the number of machines. We're only talking about potentially small changes. Again, no evidence there, must be the vibe of the thing, certainly sounds good, fewer machines on the face of it just sounds great. If you know nothing about the topic - and let's face it, given that the Cabinet didn't receive any advice or policy work on this from its Liquor and Gaming Commission - from the commission and the commissioners that are experts in this and the independent experts under legislation tasked with providing policy advice to the government - given the Cabinet didn't seek their advice, maybe all they had to go on was the vibe of the thing, and on the face of it, it seemed like a sensible measure. Well, it won't hurt, but there's no way they can say it's going to help.

Moving on to another measure announced, and that's the introduction of immediate self-exclusion available in venues via a QR code, and facial-recognition technology as part of the exclusion system. This has been previously announced, so it's not a new measure that was announced in January 2026, but it was a reiteration of a previously announced measure. The introduction of a self-exclusion system for poker machines is really an update on the current system we have and, by all means, we should be looking to update our exclusion system. This would have customers using a QR code in venues to put themselves onto the exclusion register quite promptly, which may well be a good thing. It does take a few steps currently and that could definitely be improved. The person would be entered onto a database and that would be linked to new mandatory facial recognition technology, which would identify excluded customers if they entered a gaming room.

Let's be really clear, and just for background: exclusion mechanisms are an important part of customer protection from poker machine harm for sure, but they largely rely on customers acknowledging they have a problem and deciding to take action themselves. Just for clarity - because we have a lot of really strong evidence on this from many, many years of research - evidence tells us that only about one in 10 people with an addiction to poker machines seeks help for that addiction. Only about one in 10 are at the point that they identify they have a problem and need to seek help. It's only a small subset of those people, those one in 10, who then participate in exclusion schemes. It's important to note that exclusion schemes are a marginal aspect of protecting people at a time of extremity, basically, in their struggle with an addiction to poker machines.

The other thing I'll point out, and it's really important to note this: a player card programs loss limits. A player card, though, also functions in and of itself as an exclusion scheme. You don't have to have a separate system. A player card provides an exclusion scheme because an excluded persons card is simply deactivated and as ID is required to set up a new card, they're not able to get a new card while they're excluded because they're in the system. We have a gold-standard, absolutely expert-recommended way to operate a highly effective exclusion scheme without the need for facial-recognition technology and without the need for extra measures, all built into a player card.

In the absence of a player card, a better-functioning exclusion scheme is worthwhile to invest in, but in terms of minimising pokies harm as stated by the gaming commission, it will only be of marginal impact. Exclusion schemes, as I said, apply to those at the extremity of an addiction. Let's be really clear: exclusion schemes don't prevent harm. Exclusion schemes don't prevent the development of an addiction. All they do is provide some better help to people who are at the extremity of things.

On 30 June 2025 there were 392 people in Tasmania in the exclusion scheme. With such a major focus on the exclusion system for harm-minimisation outcomes, rather than a system-wide measure such as a player card with loss limits, the government is basically guaranteeing in that binary choice to go with an exclusion scheme with facial-recognition technology instead of a player card with loss limits. They are guaranteeing that thousands of Tasmanians who use poker machines will miss out on consumer protections and empowerment that would be provided by the card, and will only be providing marginal support to people who are already at the extremity of being harmed. It's absolutely the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff. Even then, it's only picking up the people who are on death's door, not the people who maybe just have a few broken limbs. It's not the fence at the top of the cliff, which is exactly what the card would be.

It's interesting because the Deloitte report, I point members to page 35, summarises that fact that gambling harm is not restricted to only problem gamblers, or people at that very extreme end of an addiction. It references a fairly recent Victorian study, which found that 85 per cent of gambling harm was attributed to low-risk and moderate-risk gamblers. It's definitely not likely that those people would be at the extremity of their addiction and using an exclusion scheme. Eighty-five per cent of gambling harm is not going to be touched at all by an exclusion scheme. Tweaking and upgrading, and adding facial-recognition technology, it's not going to help it at all.

To clarify some terms I've just used there, when I talked about low-risk or moderate-risk gamblers: those terms don't mean that the risk is low for people who are in low-risk categories. It means that they are already exhibiting signs of harmful gambling behaviour. They're already in the lowest of the risk categories is what that means. Then there is a moderate category; that is where people are at the moderate risk, and then there is a problem gambling category above that. Nevertheless, there is harm occurring across all of those, and 85 per cent of it is in the low and moderate categories.

When I asked the government, through the briefing and in questions on notice, if they would commit to an independent evaluation of the new Tasmanian gambling exclusion scheme and the facial-recognition technology system at some period after implementation, the answer was no. No, not interested to see how it's going to work out, not interested to track how effective it may have been or may not have been.

The answer provided to me pointed instead to the fact that we have our periodic Social and Economic Impact Study of gambling in Tasmania (SEIS). Which is a valuable, broad piece of research that is done here; it used to be every three years, now it's every five. But our SEIS will not function as an evaluation or a review of the new exclusion scheme system and FRT system that they're developing. That should be, and would be, required to be reviewed and evaluated separately, and with a particular term of reference to make sure that we're actually measuring what impact, if any, that's having.

Surely if we're putting this new system in place, we would want to know how it's going, and we'd probably want to look ahead and know whether we can improve it further. But no, not intended.

It's worth mentioning here - and members may or may not be aware of this - but the pokies industry here in Tasmania is already using facial-recognition technology for monitoring exclusion in some venues. The commission hasn't approved the current system because it isn't within rules that are currently available under our system, but the government states that if there's nothing that they're doing that doesn't comply with current rules, then it's allowable.

The problem is that there are no rules specific to facial-recognition technology use in pokies venues currently, so there's no real guide on what is being done, and what impact it might have. I did ask at my briefing whether anyone had checked if the current use of facial-recognition technology by pokies venues in Tasmania complies with privacy laws, and the answer is: not that the government is aware of. No-one's checked that. I asked who would check whether the use complies with current privacy laws and there was no firm answer there either. We're not really sure who would check that.

Currently, we've got an experimental use of facial-recognition technology in pokies venues in this state, with no rules guiding it, no-one checking on whether it's complying with current privacy laws. We're apparently modelling that around a South Australian approach, but I asked: how many venues do we know of that are actually currently using this? We don't really know for sure, maybe 20. However, I've also heard from other sources that it's maybe as many as half the venues in our state doing that. It's not known.

I asked for a description of what the current use was for facial-recognition technology in venues. The way it was described to me was like this: gaming rooms have two entryways, each has a camera on it so that when people walk through into the gaming area, through either entryway, they are scanned by the camera. If that person is on that venue's internal exclusion register - because that's the one that they're linking it to at the moment - if that person is on that register and they walk past, the camera scans their face and they're flagged by the system, and then there's a flashing light and an alarm that sounds probably in the area of the coin operator where the staff member would be.

I was quite shocked to hear this description of what's currently in use in venues: that there is a scanning of someone as they enter a venue and then an alarm and flashing light go off. To me, that system which is in place currently with no rules around it, no design features that have been informed by our gaming commission, has the real potential to cause trauma, to cause shame, to cause further harm to the excluded person who might be involved. Remember, there is literally no oversight or monitoring of that current system because it doesn't really exist within our current rules.

Ms Rattray - Through you, Mr President, I would respectfully ask the honourable member if you would move that the debate stand adjourned.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. I'll finish this little section. I'll pull up stumps before I go to the next section.

The other thing that disturbs me about the fact that we are currently using completely unregulated facial-recognition technology in our venues and are proposing to build it into a system of exclusion, is that we have businesses such as casinos and hardware chains and other retail chains who have been found to use facial-recognition technology for marketing purposes in their venues. There's already been a landmark decision in 2024 from the Australian Privacy Commissioner about the use of facial-recognition technology in a large retail outlet, with questions raised about invasion of privacy and about civil liberties. The government's announced policy on facial-recognition technology, just to be really clear and I did ask this, does not prohibit or constrain venues from using facial-recognition technology installed as part of the exclusion scheme for other purposes such as marketing. There are no rules about that at the moment and it's not necessarily anticipated there will be. It's a big question mark that hangs over it.

Before I move on to the last few areas that I've got to discuss around the government's measures, noting the time, Mr President, I move -

That the debate stand adjourned.

Debate adjourned.

MOTION

Deloitte Access Economics Report: Social and Economic Impact of Electronic Gaming Machine (EGM) Reform Use in Tasmania - Consideration and Noting

Resumed from above (page 93).

[8.15 p.m.]

Ms WEBB (Nelson) - Thank you, Mr President. I'm pleased to resume my contribution on my motion, No. 15 on the Notice Paper. We've been discussing part (b) of the motion, which is going through a list of 'harm minimisation measures' - in inverted commas - for poker machine regulation announced by the government on 23 January. The one that I was up to before the break was related to the allowing of ATMs to be placed in gaming venues. Let me speak a little bit about that one.

The government, according to its announcement, plans to allow pokies venues to host ATMs onsite under the condition that they're fitted with facial-recognition technology and have a \$400 limit set for withdrawals every 24 hours. Let's be very clear: there is literally no policy rationale for this measure whatsoever. No policy rationale. This would have been at the direct request of the industry. They've been trying to get permission to put ATMs in pokies venues for years. They were incredibly upset when it was disallowed for that to happen. They've been trying for years, and here is the government absolutely caving and giving in to industry.

No-one else would have recommended that this measure be adopted as part of a suite of measures. There is no research, no policy work, no modelling that would've indicated this allowing ATMs in venues is an appropriate step to take - or what impact that could or couldn't have on harm reduction from pokie machines in this state. Zero. I would suggest, confidently, that there is no way the gaming commission and commissioners would have recommended or advised this as a measure to adopt. In fact, I suspect they would have been horrified when they learnt of it. I would feel confident in suggesting that the gaming commissioners would strongly advise against this, based on their previous decisions in this area when it comes to regulating poker machines and poker machine venues.

Access to cash is clearly a risk factor and that is a basis on which ATMs have been banned from venues for many, many years. Did the government ask the gaming commissioners about this measure before deciding to adopt it? No, the Treasurer has confirmed that the gaming commissioners were not consulted prior to a Cabinet decision. Nor would I suggest - again, with absolute confidence - Anglicare Tasmania would have suggested or advised that this ATM measure be pursued. Quite the opposite on that front, too. I think there is zero chance that Anglicare would have said this was a way to go, that this would have anything but a negative impact when it comes to pokies harm in this state. I don't presume to verbalise the commissioners, or Anglicare, I'm basing that off their previous positions clearly stated on these matters. They are quite able to disabuse me of this if it's not correct.

This is definitely yet another example of a government capitulating to industry demands to serve industry's best interests and to literally do nothing when it comes to harm minimisation. ATMs have been prohibited from Tasmanian gaming venues for many, many years, because under our current coin-based system, ready access to cash on the premises increases losses and harm. The only access to cash in venues currently is through EFTPOS, and that has been limited to \$200 per day.

It's interesting, just as a side note: I don't frequent pokies venues. I make a point not to,

but the last time, a number of years ago now, I was having a meal in a venue that had poker machines, what I experienced, and I presume it is common practice in pokies venues, is that when I went to order my meal and pay for it, I was asked, 'Would you like cash out as well?' When I got up later to get a drink at the bar, I was asked, when I paid for the drink, 'Would you like cash out as well?' Now that looks to me, very much like McDonald's model of upselling: 'Would you like fries with that?'

So, when you are in a pokies venue and you're buying a meal or you're buying a drink, you're asked, 'Would you like cash out as well?', which is basically, 'Would you like pokies with that?' That's what that means in that venue. Absolutely disgusting - the pushing towards getting cash out in order to spend in poker machines in the venue. That's the current system: EFTPOS limited to \$200 per day - thank goodness there's a limit there.

It is not clear whether the proposed TITO system that the government is putting forward is going to be moving us completely away from cash - whether, for example, the vending machine dispensing the tickets will take cards or cash or both when you are purchasing your tickets. Who knows? There is no detail because the policy work hasn't been done.

If ATMs are to be allowed into venues, it should not be until a complete switch away from any cash-based system to ideally a card-based system, which, of course, as on every other front, a player card system absolutely gets rid of the risk here. It would not matter if there was an ATM on the venue if we had a card-based system, I don't think. This is the situation where we are looking at any other option being likely to be increasing harm. The only way this proposal to introduce ATMs to venues can be regarded as remotely safe is if we were to go to that card-based system.

It is also quite astonishing because there really hasn't been much thought that I observed in the briefing I had and the questions I asked to how this was all going to intersect with each other. So, is it \$400 at the ATM and \$200 at EFTPOS or do we need to confine it to \$400 across the two systems? Is it then going to be \$600 across both systems? I'm not quite sure; it probably will be though. It will probably be \$600 you can access now in a venue through both those systems which, as I said, just opens us up to greater harm to be inflicted on Tasmanians in these venues.

There is no rationale for ATMs to be placed into venues other than they have been requested by the industry, presumably because there is an advantage to them. There's an advantage to them probably in their pokies business. There are probably other advantages to them in their businesses as well, no doubt.

The final measure in the government's list of announced measures on 23 January is related to the previously announced government policy to provide funding to Hospitality Tasmania to employ three gaming officers statewide. This is not a new measure announced; it is just a reiteration of a previously announced measure. These roles are stated to have an educative and support function - working with venue staff to improve the ability of venues to manage their obligations, including the challenge of responding to people with signs of harmful gambling and addiction.

Apparently, this is based on a model used in South Australia. Although, in the briefing that I had, the government's representatives couldn't identify why this model was chosen in answer to a question taken on notice at the briefing, the answer that came back from the Treasurer claims this, and I quote:

South Australia's model provides a practical example of how gaming care

officers can operate effectively alongside existing regulatory frameworks. Their experience demonstrates that those roles can support venue staff, improve awareness of gambling harm indicators and strengthen referral and support pathways.

But the problem about that is that the government cannot point to any specific evidence of those claims. Has the presence of gaming officers in South Australia been demonstrated to reduce harm in any way whatsoever? I don't believe so. I am happy to have it pointed out to me, but I don't believe that has been demonstrated.

When they say that it operates effectively alongside existing regulatory frameworks, I'm sure it does. Regulatory frameworks consistently across our country, except in Western Australia, fail to reduce harm, fail to protect consumers at poker machines. And so, if these gaming officers work seamlessly alongside that existing failing system when it comes to harm minimisation, I'm not surprised that what we are going to see here is absolutely no impact from these officers once they're in place.

Victoria has had similar liaison officers as a model in that state, and there is no evidence there that this has helped reduce pokies harm, no evidence. It's not clear why these roles are not attached to the gaming commission, for example, rather than the peak industry body. It looks like a little gift of some extra staffing to the peak industry body just to help them out, maybe?

Apparently, the rationale I have heard is that you cannot put them with the gaming commission because the gaming commission is doing its regulatory role of the sector. We could not have it doing a capacity-building, training or support role as well, which is what these officers are supposed to be. I think that is rubbish. I think we have lots of other instances where there are entities responsible for both of those things. You just create separate roles and have different areas of operation and reporting within your organisation to deal with that.

When it comes to identifying and responding to people exhibiting signs of harmful gambling and addiction, our industry utterly fails at that, and it's hard not to think that that's just a built-in design feature rather than an anomaly or something that's being done accidentally. It's not hard to see signs of harmful gambling when people are lining up at 8 a.m. in the morning outside your venue, that's a sign right there. How many people do you think get turned away at the door at that time, which would be responsible service of gambling? I cannot go to a bar with signs of intoxication and be served alcohol, but I can absolutely exhibit flagrant signs of gambling harm in a gaming venue here and be served gambling products - absolutely, that happens every day in this state.

The government has stated an intention to review this initiative of gaming officers after three years of it being implemented. It has confirmed this will be an independent review but it has not indicated the measures on which it would be assessed as successful or otherwise, or what it would be evaluated against. It is puzzling to me why we would be readily committing to reviewing this measure but completely objecting to the idea of evaluating and reviewing the new revamped exclusion scheme and facial-recognition system that they have been putting in place. Why does this warrant an evaluation and review after three years and the other system doesn't, given the other one is much more essential to the actual experience of consumers who are interacting with our poker machine industry? Maybe it's because an evaluation of this will somehow be helpful to the industry, no doubt. They will get a pat on the back from it after three years.

Mr President, that's the list of measures there in the motion under (1)(b), the government's purported harm minimisation suite of measures, which I absolutely refute as having any real, meaningful relationship to genuine harm minimisation. Certainly not harm prevention, absolutely marginal at best.

There are a few questions we should ask ourselves about this suite of measures. One is, who asked for it? Who asked for that measure to be put in place? I can guarantee you on every single one it would be industry, and I think on every single one you would not have any other credible stakeholder coming from another perspective, whether it's advocates in the gambling space, whether it's researchers, whether it's independent entities like the gaming commission - no-one else would have asked for these measures.

We have to ask ourselves: what's the evidence base for it? I have spoken to that on each of them. There is none that meaningfully says they will be effective. We have to ask ourselves if there was consultation with our gaming commission on any of these. I don't believe there was. And we have to ask who is going to benefit when none of these work to reduce harm, and the answer to that is really clear: it's the industry.

We would also ask ourselves: how on earth could any Cabinet be presented with this suite of measures to approve with absolutely nothing to back it up and inform that decision to say this is a responsible way forward, and then pass them? What Cabinet could do that?

The next part of the motion is a simple part noting Tasmania's annual poker machine losses for 2024-25 and that those losses totaled \$193,908,165, which, by my calculations, is a decade-high level of losses in this state. I am going to add to that because I've just had a quick look now at the year-to-date figures. There are monthly figures provided on the Treasury website and for 2025-26, so far on the monthly numbers coming through, by my estimation we are going to land over \$200 million in losses this year. That's what we're tracking for, really clearly. That's going to be horrifying. I don't think we've been north of \$200 million for a very long time when it comes to pokies losses in this state. That's the trajectory that we're on. It's an upward trajectory; it's not plateauing trajectory, or a downward trajectory, like it was in the decade leading into COVID. We are on an upward trajectory. This is an issue that is only having increasing urgency to be properly addressed in this state, which is all the more horrifying then to think about what the government is proposing to do.

Most of the measures announced by the government have nothing to do with harm minimisation; they're likely to potentially increase harm, in fact. By comparison, the player card with its mandatory loss limits, its effective built-in self-exclusion, its provision of real-time and accumulative data to the customer, as well as to the state, would provide effective customer protections and empowerment - empowerment of the consumer. It would be effective in protecting us against money laundering. The evidence tells us that the pokies card with loss limits is vastly better than any individual or cumulative measures that the government is putting forward here.

The last part of the motion calls on the government to confirm two things. They're really straightforward, so this is a completely uncontroversial motion in and of itself, because we are just noting things, and people can provide their own reflections on the things we are noting. I've done that in my contribution. People won't necessarily agree with me; they will have their own reflections to make, but we are reflecting and noting a few things. This is the call at the end, calling on the government to confirm whether, one, modelling has been done on the social and economic impact of the government-announced measures and, two, whether prior to the decision to adopt the measures, the government obtained advice from the Tasmanian Liquor and Gaming Commission on the effectiveness of the announced measures to prevent or reduce

harm from pokie machines.

To prevent potential technical quibbling, I think it is clear in the second one that what is meant by obtained advice from the Tasmanian Liquor and Gaming Commission - the gaming commission overseen by the three commissioners, including chief commissioner Jenny Cranston - was advice obtained from that gaming commission, not necessarily just people who happen to be located in Treasury somewhere near the gaming commission - or responsible, for, perhaps, administrative oversight of some of the staff who work for the gaming commission.

These are just two things to confirm. It should be really easy for the government to confirm it. They could do it in their contribution today, and then that's done and dusted in terms of responding to the motion. That's why the motion is not remotely controversial to support. In fact, since I put this motion forward, some more information has come to light about the confirmation of some details. So, we already have most of that on the public record. However, I would like that to be confirmed here by the government, in their contribution, on this parliamentary record, because I think that it should be important for that to be very clear.

My assertion has been, all the way through, that there's no modelling that has been done on the social and economic impact of these announced measures. None, and they've been adopted in the complete absence of advice from the Tasmanian gaming commissioners, on the effectiveness of the measures to prevent or reduce harm from pokie machines. Absolutely, that's the confirmation that I'm looking for.

As I make my way towards drawing to a conclusion, let me sum this up. Pokie machines can be made less addictive and less harmful. We know exactly how to do that. The Rockliff government continues to purposefully choose not to make pokie machines less addictive and less harmful. For a brief time, that was not the case. When the policy to introduce a pokie machine player card with programmed loss limits was adopted and development of the player card was underway, Tasmania was taking a nation-leading, evidence-based, expert-advice path on preventing and reducing addiction and harm from pokie machines. That is now even more thoroughly confirmed by the government-commissioned Deloitte report, published in January this year.

However, this Rockliff government and every member of the Cabinet who approved that abandonment of the player card turned away from the proven, positive, life-saving approach of the player card. They have thrown it in the bin and adopted in its place a farcical list of measures that will not, in any meaningful way, prevent addiction or harm from poker machines. This list of measures is not based on any research, policy development work, advice from the independent gaming commissioners or credible evidence. The social and economic impact of these measures has not been modelled, and the government has not indicated any intention to do such modelling, despite the fact they insisted the player card couldn't continue without that modelling being done, which was the reason given for the Deloitte report to be commissioned in the first place.

The Rockliff government and every member of the Cabinet who approved the abandonment of the evidence-based, independently proven player card has done so at the behest of the vested interests of the pokies industry, because other than those vested interests from the industry, there are literally no other stakeholders, independent experts or representative groups that would have suggested, requested or advised the abandonment of the card and the switch to the flawed measures announced.

The pokies industry is a major donor to the Liberal Party; that is a matter of fact, most recently having provided a massive donation of \$217,000 at last year's state election. It is

literally impossible not to connect those dots, because it could not be more blatantly obvious. This is state capture by vested interests, pure and simple. State capture is a type of systemic political corruption in which private interests significantly influence a state's decision-making to their own advantage. With its capitulation and coming to heel to the pokies industry, the Rockliff Liberal government has provided a textbook example of state capture.

We have a clearly understood, documented and studied public health issue of addiction to poker machines which is harming thousands of Tasmanians. It's destroying lives; it's crippling futures at considerable cost to our state at a time of budget crisis. We know exactly how to address this public health issue and the harm caused, at comparatively very little cost to the public purse: the player card with programmed loss limits is the solution. This Rockliff government, and every minister in it, is deliberately choosing to throw away that policy to abandon the thousands of Tasmanians affected and the thousands more who will continue to become addicted into the future. There is no evidence whatsoever to support the abandonment of the player card, no trigger to do so, other than what we can surmise to be the direct request or demand of the vested interests of the pokies industry.

In addition to the mountain of existing evidence, the Deloitte report provides every reason: social, economic, health, community; every reason to stick with the policy of introducing a player card with programmed loss limits. Instead, replacement measures have been doctored up at the direction of the pokies industry and announced with no evidence whatsoever to back them as the best way forward. In fact, so little policy work has been done on those announced measures that the centrepiece of it all, the TITO system, has virtually no detail available on the specifics of its features. Now, not only is there no evidence to show the announced measures will make any meaningful improvement, but the evidence also broadly indicates some of the measures are likely to create greater harm than our current system.

If this wasn't costing Tasmanian lives and futures every day, we would say this was a farcical, inept joke; but it is far too cruel for that, because the Rockliff government and every Cabinet minister has bent to the will of donor vested interests at the expense of evidence-based public health policy. Here is what we can guarantee as a direct result of preventable pokies harm: there will continue to be Tasmanian children who will go hungry, who will be exposed to higher levels of domestic violence, who will have their families broken apart, whose families will become homeless and be added to our housing waiting list, who will develop their own mental health and trauma issues, and struggle to stay engaged at school and build towards their own future.

Here is the cruellest part: those children will grow up with higher levels of stress and trauma, and they will be more likely to live in lower socio-economic suburbs where pokies venues are concentrated, both of which will significantly increase the risk that they have of developing an addiction to poker machines as an adult. That is what we can guarantee as a result of the choice made by Premier Rockliff and his Cabinet ministers. By the way, the Labor Party policy is absolutely no better. The Labor Party is equally, if not more, captured by the pokies industry and operating under its direction when it comes to pokies policy; but it doesn't have to be this way. Instead, the Rockliff government, with the support of the Labor Party, could continue the policy of introducing a player card with programmed loss limits, which evidence tells us will be highly effective in preventing and reducing a significant proportion of the addiction and harm Tasmanians experience from poker machines. The choice is there to make. There is still time to do the right thing here.

I implore both the Rockliff government and every Cabinet minister in it to throw off the shady influence of pokies-vested interests which taints this government and this opposition, get

back on the right side of history and continue implementing the player card that we had developed for our state, that was gold-plated and nation-leading.

On that note, I ask members to support this motion.

[10.06 p.m.]

Ms WEBB (Nelson) - Thank you, Madam Deputy President. Thank you to members for their contributions on the motion. I appreciate those who shared their thoughts and also reflected from their different perspectives on this topic, which is one we have periodically encountered in this state and in this place for us to discuss in terms of impact and all the range of problematic issues that swirl around it.

Thank you to the member for Hobart. I appreciated your reflections, particularly in relation to that trajectory of capture that we have seen in the state for, as you say, 50 years now, or most likely more.

I appreciate the member for Murchison's contribution and going through the various matters in the motion and contributing her thoughts to that. I very much appreciate her nodding to the fact that various government measures may not do any harm and may well be worthwhile putting forward - we don't have any evidence for it, but it won't hurt, necessarily. Some of them, though, may well hurt. That is problematic. The government can't tell us that they won't because they haven't put the evidence to it or modelled it.

The member for Mersey, thank you. I think there is an enduring interest there because of that inquiry back in 2017. It was a really big inquiry, and it was a worthwhile one to get a whole lot of material on the record about the impact of poker machines on this state. I appreciate your ongoing interest and the fact you pointed out that addiction can in fact affect anyone. Certain factors do make you more vulnerable to developing an addiction if you happen to sit down in front of poker machines. I spoke about some of those in my contribution. Of course, those factors can be present in any socio-economic group, factors like stress, grief and trauma. Proximity to poker machines could be present in other groups as well, but we have purposefully clustered them in lower socio-economic communities. We've really put them in harm's way. I appreciate that.

There are some matters I have picked up on that have come out in the government's response. It's really quite farcical, to be honest, to stand here and make these statements and to make the point of pointing out to members that they have been presented with no evidence base whatsoever and no modelling whatsoever. They are empty claims.

To go straight to the final comment from the Leader on behalf of the government, it's astonishing to say there is no single reform that's a silver bullet. That might be true, but every single thing the government claims it's trying to achieve with its list of measures that it announced on 23 January - every single thing that they announced - can be done better with a player card. We know that for sure from evidence. Improvements to the exclusion scheme with facial-recognition technology can be done better by a player card. Ensuring that everybody is better protected who uses poker machines can be absolutely done better by a player card than any of the things the government has suggested. The sorts of modernisation they want to achieve by implementing a TITO system - a very old system from interstate, by the way - can be achieved better with a player card. The sorts of things you might want to be putting in place

by extending closing hours or putting caps on machines - neither of which can be shown to directly impact harm and reduce it - can be done better by a player card because we know that will. Evidence tells us it will. It has been modelled.

While a player card, we might not go so far as to say it's a silver bullet, it's pretty damn close to a silver bullet. The government knows it. It's got every bit of evidence telling it that. Every single expert has told it that. We now have independent modelling that tells us that. For them to turn around and say there is no silver bullet is actually utterly insulting. It is absolutely cruel and offensive to the tens of thousands of Tasmanian people who in some way or another are impacted on and harmed by poker machine gambling. Offensive to say there is no silver bullet, nonsense.

Equally offensive is the government talking about this nonsense about balancing - how is it that they phrase it? - balancing harm and choice. Well, guess what? There is nothing balanced about the way the government is approaching it because nothing that they have put forward is going to materially impact harm, reduce harm. It is absolutely ridiculous to suggest there is any balance here.

By the way, it is absolutely a choice that people can exercise under a card; they are empowered to make good choices with a card. A card gives them information, it gives them choice and control, it gives them the ability to track their losses and gives them the ability to make choices about what limits they might set because the card allows people to change the limits that are on it. You have to be able to show if you want to increase it beyond the standard amount set. You have to be able to show that you can afford to do that, but it provides you with a choice to do that. You can lower the preset loss limits if you like. Plenty of choice, plenty of control, plenty of balance, actually. We know at this point that half the money going into machines and going as profits to the pokies industry is coming from people being harmed, we know that's the case. There is nothing balanced about that, absolutely nothing. That's entirely serving the profit interests of one industry and a small number of people in that industry, quite frankly, and entirely against and victimising Tasmanians who are vulnerable to these machines.

It isn't a matter of having a different opinion about what the balance between harm and choice look like, this is policy-making by a state government on a public health issue that is well documented and understood. What we expect of state government in that sense is to do policy development that is based on evidence and based on putting public interest first. It's not about having a different opinion, this is about following evidence and having solutions to public health issues that work.

We know what that would be - it would be a player card. It is absolutely offensive for the government to suggest here we have a different opinion about what's the best way forward. We're not. We have one side to make a case for a player card that's entirely backed by evidence and well-nigh a silver bullet, and we have the government, who are putting forward a spurious list of things that have been shown to be marginally effective at best in some instances, and likely to be more harmful in others. That's what we've got here on the two sides of this argument. It is not a difference of opinion. It's like saying if there's a difference of opinion by saying the earth is round and someone saying the earth is flat. It is not a difference of opinion. Someone has the facts backed by evidence and someone is just spouting nonsense.

It is really clear the government tries to explain that they don't want to take the time to model the social and economic impact of their list of measures like what was done by the

Deloitte report. I presume that sort of modelling could be turned around in a matter of mere months, actually. Deloitte has just done it for the card. You could probably get them to do it again for the list of measures the government has put forward. We are talking about the government not wanting to take the time to do that because we have to act right now instead of waiting around to study the impact.

Here's the thing though. In the briefing I had from the government and what they have been quite up front about is these measures are not being implemented immediately, some come into effect in the middle of this year, on 30 June. For example, the matters relating to bringing the cap down, potentially. But others, like the TITO system and some of the facial-recognition exclusion systems, aren't coming online for another two years. This is a two-year program of work. If we can't take the time to take a couple of months to have a straightforward bit of modelling done on these measures - perhaps by Deloitte, who have just done it on the pokies card - to tell us whether they are going to work or not, then, actually, we are just waiting around to waste our money on them - or maybe not. Maybe we are not wasting our money on them, maybe we are saving the money for the industry and what we know will be some donations in the future. Maybe that is what we are waiting to do.

Ms O'Connor - One hundred per cent.

Ms WEBB - Absolutely spurious. There is literally nothing that was put forward in the government's response here, and it's unfortunate that the Leader for the Government had to read out that nonsense, quite frankly. Nothing about that enables us to point to any evidence, anything, to dispute the assertions that I have made, which is that this is entirely dictated by industry. The government has come to heel, delivered them exactly what they want, there is no evidence to support it, it won't work in reducing harm, and in following this path and throwing out the player card, the government has demonstrated that it is absolutely putting vested interests first above human lives in this state, above the lives of vulnerable Tasmanians.

I find it very interesting to hear the things that are blatantly misleading about what the government says about its measures. There is a lot more to dig into here around the assertions made by government, and more and more it comes to light that they do not know what they are talking about - they have put forward these measures.

In the government's response they talked about the extension of the closing hours from four hours to seven hours. They said that it would mean that at the times of day when there is a higher propensity for problem gamblers to be betting, they would be better protected. That is nonsense. There is nothing in the government's policy that says when those closing hours have to happen. There is nothing in the government's policy that says the seven hours of closing, up from four, have to be at a time when people are likely to be harmed, and we know exactly when that would be but that is not what's required. Venues can close for those seven hours whenever they wish. Most venues already close for seven hours a day. A very small proportion are currently open for the entire 20 hours allowable. Not only will this measure not affect, probably, more than a handful of venues around the state, but government is now trying to be deceptive to pretend that their required seven hours is going to somehow be targeted at harmful times of the day - rubbish. That is not in the policy.

There is so much more to dig into here about what is being claimed by the government, about who suggested it to the government, about the absolute invisibility of any policy work actually done on this by the government. The Leader's response on behalf of the government

seemed to suggest that Treasury had done a bunch of policy work on this - not the commission, but Treasury. They didn't speak to the commission until after the Cabinet decision was made; that was very clear from the Treasurer in the other place. The commission didn't do any policy work on it, but apparently Treasury did.

Well, here's the thing: when I sat down from my briefing there was a person from Treasury there. In fact the person the Treasurer referred to in the other place didn't know squat about the details of these measures, couldn't answer any of the questions. Either that means I was having information about them withheld from me, and I wasn't having my questions answered honestly or openly, or that person from Treasury, who was apparently the one who advised into this space on this list of measures, actually knows very little about them and isn't able to provide the information, so, therefore that policy work hasn't been done. I am not saying that as a reflection on that person from Treasury. This is all under the direction of the government, under the Treasurer, and it is the fault of Cabinet if it made decisions with literally no policy work behind them. If they had policy work, then point us to it. Where is the evidence?

It is absolutely astonishing that in the government's response we heard not once, but twice, the Leader on behalf of the government said that we have the lowest spend in the country and the lowest prevalence of problem gambling. Well, guess what, that's what I pointed out in my contribution, too. The protective factors we've had in place here - that mean we have the lowest spend and have the lowest prevalence of problem gambling - are being stripped away by this list of things the government is putting forward. We are moving towards the other jurisdictions that have higher losses, higher levels of harm, and higher levels of problem gambling. We're not moving away from them, we're moving towards them.

The government is absolutely deluded to think that it's a positive to point to the fact that we have the lowest spend and the lowest prevalence compared to other states at the same it's making the case to move towards them in the measures that we're putting in place with the TITO scheme and allowing cash access in venues through ATMs, and things like that. It's absolutely astonishing.

Here's the thing. When I talk about the fact that the 2024-25 losses of \$193 million odd were the highest in a decade - and that's appalling - what we're seeing now is that it's escalating. That is not necessarily unconnected to the fact that we have financial pressure and community pressure building around the cost-of-living issues that everyone is facing. When cost-of-living issues crunch on people, harm from pokies goes up. People are seeking relief through going into that zone. They do seek to chase away the stress that they're facing by sitting in front of a machine.

As I said in my contribution - and I did some quick calculations while other members were making theirs - on the basis so far of the eight months of data we have in this financial year, 2025-26, the monthly losses are looking even higher. When I take the eight months of data that we already have, and I average that as a monthly average for the eight months so far, and then I extrapolate it out to 12 months for this financial year, that has us on track to have losses this financial year of \$209 million-plus. That is an enormous jump. It may not come to pass that we get to exactly \$209 million, but that's what we are on track for so far, looking at the monthly losses across 2025-26. I predict we absolutely will go north of \$200 million in losses. If it gets to \$209 million or more, I believe - and the member for Hobart or the member for Mersey might recall from data they've seen in previous years through their different roles - I think that might be a state record for pokies losses in Tasmania, an annual state record if we

make it to \$209 million in 2025-26. That's appalling. That means as we push towards potentially greater harm with the government's measures, we are in serious trouble. The trajectory of that number will only continue to go up.

It's spurious to say that our SEIS is going to, in any way, evaluate or review the government's measures meaningfully. Of course, that's needed to be done in an evaluative way and a reviewing way, independently and separately. The SEIS is a broad study on many issues to do with prevalence and to do with gambling practices and habits in this state. It provides us with data, but it doesn't evaluate specific elements of our regulatory framework. If the government had any faith in the measures they're putting forward, they'd have them evaluated, they'd have them modelled, they'd have the evidence here ready for us to see. They don't have it and it absolutely stinks to high heaven because this is people's lives - Tasmanian lives - we're talking about.

I think there is a lot more for us to look at here, and as the member for Murchison said, our job is scrutiny. It is the job of this Chamber to look at government policy decisions and ask to be shown where the evidence is and demonstrate that this is the right way forward. I think there are a lot more opportunities to do that on this topic, on these specific measures the government is putting forward, particularly now that we know so much more about how absolutely valuable a player card would be to this state, on every measure available to us.

I commend the motion to the House.

Motion agreed to.